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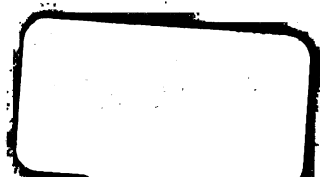
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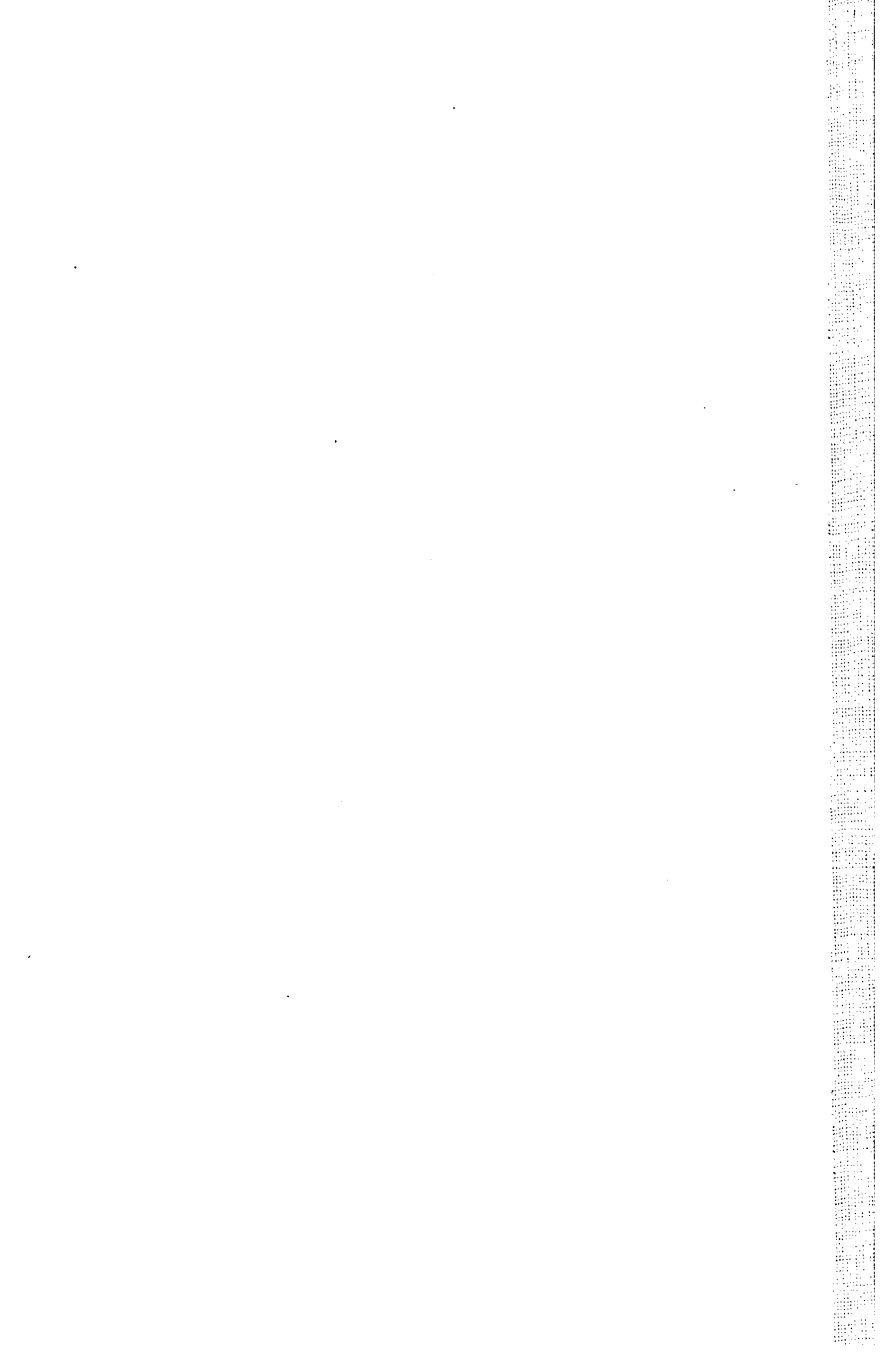
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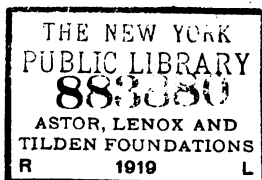
RICHARD AUMERLE MAHER

AUTHOR OF "THE SHEPHERD OF THE NORTH," "GOLD MUST
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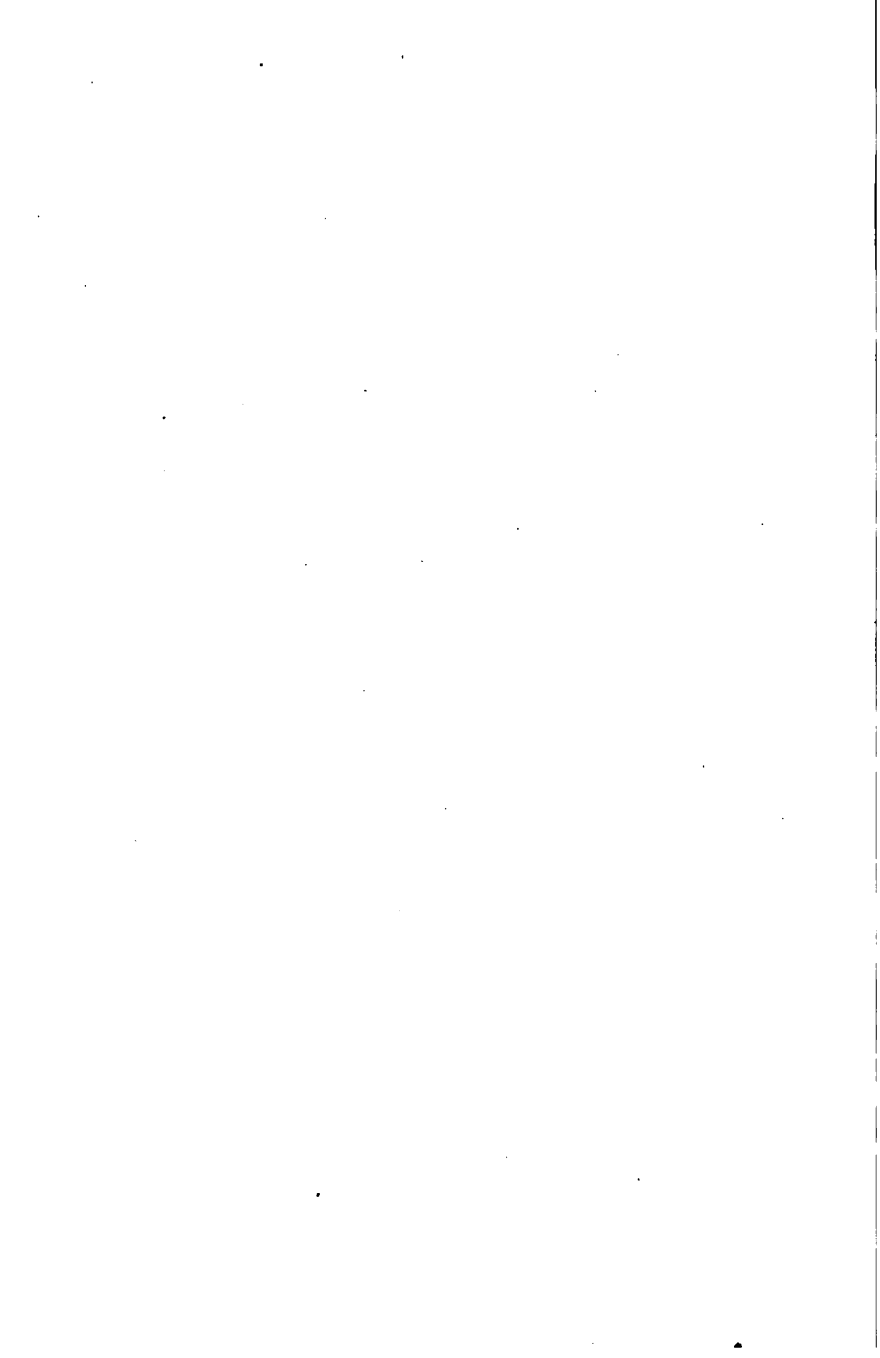


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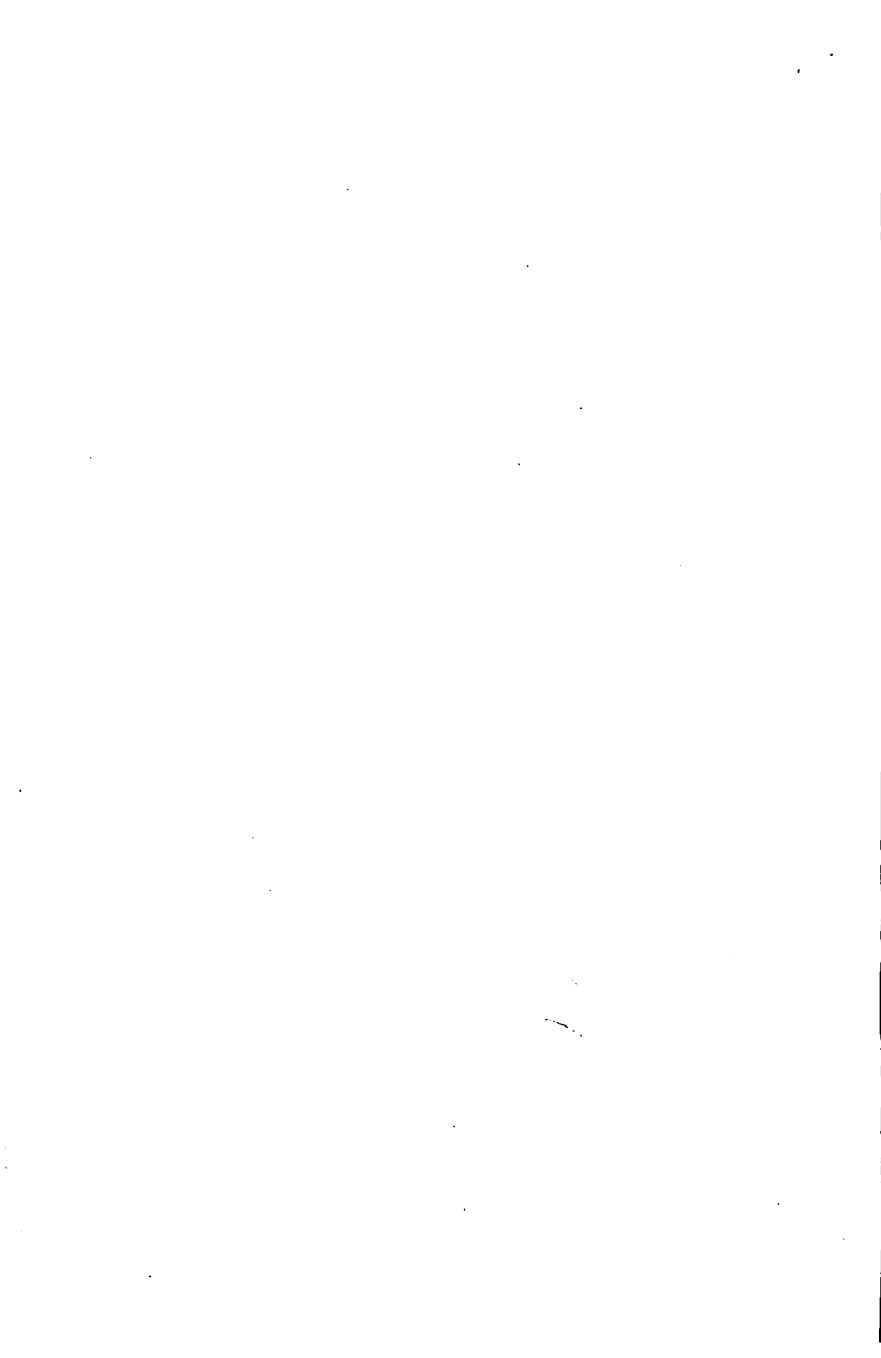
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THE HILLS OF DESIRE



THE HILLS OF DESIRE

I

"WELL, I was wan. The two Maddens was two. Eddie Carey was three. Jim Powers was four. And—and—But there was five of us, an' I know it. Wait. I'll count fresh.

"I was wan. The two Maddens was two. Eddie Carey was three. Jim Powers was four——"

"Shtop it, Casey! I say, Shtop it! I'll be as crazy as you next. Altogether, I say, altogether how many of you was on the picnic? *All-together!*"

"Five, I repeat. On me honor as a bricklayer! Five, I will have it. But I cannot, for the life of me, recollect the fifth. I'll count again——

"I was wan. The two Maddens was two——"

Augusta opened the door to announce tearfully:

"Mister Jimmie, the boarders are saying that they can't stand it!"

"To arms!" cried Jimmie Wardwell, leaping up from the table and typewriter where he had been laboriously pounding out Casey's count of the picnic, "to arms to repel boarders!"

And he caught the wholly unready and dignified Augusta full in his arms and kissed her fairly.

Now Augusta is somewhat incredible. I suppose I can hardly make you understand her—as much of her, I mean, as I could ever understand. But, having a whole book before me in which to deal with her, I am going to try to explain to you the things about her which may be explained.

There was, for instance, Augusta's look of seraphic innocence. Women looked at her the first time and she looked back at them with her friendly, ready-to-wear—"Good morning, I hope you are as happy as I am," look.

Then they drew away from her with a defensive pursing of backs, saying:

"She *can't* be so good as that! Or so innocent!"

But then, as they continued to study her, they saw that she was just the gold that she showed. Then they took her suddenly to their hearts and wanted to mother her.

Here it must be explained that Augusta had never till this moment been kissed by a man. She knew that there was no harm in Jimmie Wardwell's kiss. To know innocence and harmlessness, when one meets them, is as great a part of wisdom as to know their opposites when met. Augusta had this large division of wisdom. Yet she was unaccountably hurt by Jimmie's act.

She was angry, but not with the anger that would prompt her to box his ears; as would have been adequate in a smaller matter. She would not let it go as a boy-and-girl tilt.

Jimmie Wardwell, looking into the dry, pained depths of the girl's gray-blue eyes, saw that she was not going to be angry in any ordinary way. He had hurt her. And he was going to be punished. He stood, suddenly quiet and sober, awaiting his verdict.

"You will have to leave the house, Mr. Wardwell," she said at last, very quietly. "You must make your own reason. I do not wish to be obliged to tell mother."

She had spoken with a grave, settled finality which left Jimmie Wardwell silent and without defense.

The girl dropped the matter where she had finished it. Nor did she return to the other matter about which she had come to the room. She crossed to the typewriter

and stood looking down reading the story that showed half written there.

"I thought you were going to begin on your own work," she said, ignoring everything that had passed.

Wardwell knew that he had been ordered out of his boarding house as definitely as if his trunk had been deposited on Eighteenth Street. But he was willing to forget that for the instant and to answer on the new ground that she had chosen.

"I did do something on the book," he said. "But what's the use! I can't put the time on it. I'd never finish it. I have to live. And that"—he pointed angrily at the paper on the machine—"that's the only kind of stuff that anybody'll pay me for! I couldn't sell *that* if it wasn't ancient and bearded!"

"You couldn't sell that," the grave critic answered judiciously, "if it wasn't good of it's kind. But you don't love it. So you always hate to have to do it, and you must get away from it."

"Yes," said Wardwell, "I must." But it was plain that he was not thinking of her wise counsel about himself and his work. He was thinking of this child—She was no more in time, just a year out of Julia Richman High School. Yet it was a woman's personality that looked out of her child's dancing eyes.

He did think of returning to the question of his leaving. But he remembered that there was no question. It was not a matter of appeasing her anger, of explaining. She knew. She understood. And she had spoken her decision.

"I wonder," the girl said, crossing to look down into the street. "Mother is very long in coming. And she never delays. Could anything happen to her between here and Sixteenth Street. But, of course, what *could* happen! She goes and comes every morning. And everybody knows her."

"I don't know," said Jimmie darkly, peering doubtfully down into the street. "This great city is full of designing men. I've often wondered how you let her go about the streets in broad day unchaperoned. A lovely woman, an altogether delectable woman!" he proceeded, warming up to his nonsense. "Why, she's not safe a minute!"

"In fact," he announced cheerfully, "I've often thought of running away with her myself."

Augusta's laugh broke through the gathering cloud of anxiety on her face, and her eyes danced as she thought of her mother, Rose Wilding, Rose the strong, the capable, the wise, the mother of all the street, being carried off—Her white hair, her broad, stately person, her two hundred pounds of active woman!

"You're right, of course; I know you are. It's silly to think of anything happening to her. But sometimes, you know, before things happen a feeling of dread comes over me. And I just *know* that something is wrong. I don't know where it comes from, or how. Did you ever feel yourself waiting for a loud shock to come before you hear it?"

Wardwell looked sharply at the girl for an instant. He had heard some strange things from women in the boarding house. They certainly believed that Augusta had some insight or foresight, or something. She had told them things about themselves. But when he spoke he was blandly didactic.

"That, you know," he explained, "is just the first quiver of the shock, felt by the ganglia, the nerve knots; before the rude noise gets to the brain."

"*There was a man in our town,*" Augusta chanted, skipping to the door, "*And he was wondrous wise—*"

Wardwell listened to the receding hum of her voice as it died down in the well of the stairs. Then he turned and with a vicious yank tore the offending story of

Casey's picnic from the machine and ground the paper into the floor with his heel.

An hour later he was sitting on the floor with half a novel of loose sheets of paper scattered all about him. He had found the table too small for the work, had transferred his operations to the bed—he was cutting madly at page after page of the type-written stuff—but, finding that he was jabbing the pencil through the paper, he had swept the whole business to the floor and gone at it with vengeance.

He had spent eight months on the book, and it was still a formless wad of words. There was an idea in it, a live, working idea. But "The Feet of the Plodders," as he was calling the book, would neither plod nor jig. They strutted along, he complained, stiff as wooden horses, fatuous as roosters.

"You talk like a hatful of wood," he said contemptuously to Gerald Straight, his hero, who, on the paper, was giving out some pet ideas of Wardwell's own on the dignity of labor. Down came the pencil and the whole paragraph was condemned as, "Rot!"

He did not notice Augusta coming back into the room. He looked up as he grunted his disapproval of what he had thought very fine while writing it.

The girl stood in the doorway, swaying and clutching desperately at the door frame for support. She must have run madly up the stairs, for it was plain that she was breathless from physical exertion, as well as speechless from some strange, uncanny fright.

"She's gone!" she gasped, as Wardwell jumped from the floor and hurried to her. "I can almost see it! It almost seems that I did see it," she went on, fighting with herself to tell a plain story.

"The apple woman at the corner saw her fall. Her head struck on the curb. The apple woman ran to her.

But she got to her feet and walked away without looking back.

"Right past her own doorway she went, without looking up—the apple woman saw her—and straight over toward Broadway.

"I ran all the way, asking, begging people to say they'd seen her. But not one would say it!"

"But," said Wardwell, "it doesn't prove anything. She was a little dazed. She didn't want to come in to frighten you. She just walked around a little and went, maybe, to a doctor. That's what she'd do, can't you see?"

"I wish I could, Jimmie. But it isn't what she'd do at all. She'd just walk quietly into the house, and I'd never know that anything had happened.

"I'm going out again! I can't stay, she may be wandering farther and farther from me every minute!"

There was a fierce, mothering eagerness in the girl's voice, as though she already saw the tragedy of the months to come, and had already taken up the burden of being mother to her mother.

Wardwell laid a gentle hand on the girl's shoulder, saying:

"I think you could better let me go. I can go farther than you."

"She went toward Broadway," the girl said slowly. "But it's no use trying to save me that way. I must find her *myself*. I *know* that."

Jimmie had already pushed past her through the door and started for the stairs. He saw that she was in such a state that unless she saw someone doing something she would herself start out again.

"Thank you," she said simply. "But I cannot promise to stay in."

"I think you must. You know we're both foolish. We don't either of us really believe that anything's

happened to her. But you must stay in. She's sure to come in any minute."

Arguing her into a kind of silent promise that she would not go out and would not worry, Wardwell left the house and started east through Eighteenth Street.

In the open, quiet street, away from the urge of Augusta's excitement, Wardwell felt entirely foolish. He expected to see the strong-willed, self-reliant woman who was Augusta's mother coming along the street at any moment, and he wondered what he should say to her.

Nothing ever did happen, anyway. Rose Wilding had just walked into a drug store or a doctor's, maybe, and had had to wait. That was it, of course.

He walked toward Broadway, taking, without any conscious notion of following a trace, the direction which the old apple woman had given.

Coming out of the quiet cross street he stepped thoughtlessly into the rush of traffic that sweeps through Union Square. An automobile brushed carelessly by within inches of him. A great lumbering truck came charging down upon him. A motorcycle screamed at his ear. He leaped back to the curb, muttering at the grinning fiend in goggles who shot past.

Wardwell stood on the curb looking out over the shifting lines and tides of trucks, handcarts, automobiles, horses and people. He was looking for one person out of the hundreds and hundreds that moved within range of his eye. As well, he thought, look for a particular stone in the paving.

A few men have stepped into the wilderness and never been seen again. But how many, many men, and women, have stepped off a curb into a stream like that and never been seen again.

There's Flynn, the cop, across the street. He knows me by sight. He could say he saw me step off the curb.

And that's all he could say. I could lose myself from anybody that ever saw me. The string that holds us where we are is so thin that—Why it's a wonder that anybody stays where he is! It's so easy to walk out, completely out!

And then some of Augusta's excited worry came upon him. Rose Wilding *might* have been stunned by the fall. She *might* have walked, dazed, right past her own door, right off this curb and into that sea of moving life!

"Is it kiddin' me you are?" snorted officer Flynn. "Lookin' for your boarding mistress! More like, she's lookin' for you."

"No, I'm not," said Jimmie quietly. "I'm right in earnest. Her daughter has it that she fell and struck her head on the curb, and lost—"

"Sure. There'd have to be a daughter in it."

"Oh, go to Blazes!" snapped Jimmie, turning on his heel.

"I might have known better," he growled as he walked away. "They never do anything unless you show them a corpse. And then they'd like to club you for giving them trouble."

He turned south, looking to the only other resource he knew. He was a New Yorker with all of a New Yorker's entire dependence on the two forces that govern his town—the police and the newspapers.

At Astor Place he ran across Jim Ray, a dark little crank of a man, a man who looked as old as the first thing that ever happened, and seemed to have been present at every happening since the first. He was coming from a stormy, snapping interview with an irate, bullying financier, and he was on his way to get the personal story of an interesting adventuress who had gotten herself into jail.

But he listened to Wardwell. In fact, he always

listened to everything, until he was sure it was not worth listening to.

He had known Wardwell during the latter's sporadic incursions into newspaper work, and had shown a grudging, contrary sort of liking for him.

"Which do you want to go on," Ray questioned non-committally, "the facts, or the daughter's imagination?"

"Both," said Wardwell stubbornly.

"All right," Ray admitted. "But, if you don't want to be guyed, stick to the facts. Go on down to the office, Grayson will be just about coming in. Tell him I sent you. He'll give the word to the boys as they're going out on their assignments. If anything has happened to the woman, they'll get the thread somewhere."

Wardwell was more or less at home in Newspaper Row, and he thoroughly believed that no accident happening in the city could slip through the net of active intelligence centered there. When he had gotten assurance that the word would be passed to all the reporters going out for their rounds, that every newspaper in the city would be informed, that every police blotter and hospital record would be scanned, he started back to the house with the sure feeling that he had done all that was possible.

Augusta listened, dry-eyed, almost listless, it seemed. She did not say anything. It was plain that she had expected nothing from his search. And Wardwell was chilled by the obvious fact, that he had really accomplished nothing.

Augusta sat a little while, not seeming to notice that Wardwell had stopped speaking. Her soft blue eyes took on a deep, dark blue in which there was no visible expression. Her features were strained and sharp, as though she reached somewhere to another medium of

knowledge, outside the common senses. After a little she said vaguely:

"She is not hurt. Not that way. She cannot be found that way. She has lost her thought. I've never yet called to her without getting an answer."

"Eh, what's that?" questioned Jimmie sharply.

The girl seemed to be awakened by his voice. She shivered and suddenly jumped up from her chair.

"What was I saying—? I don't remember."

"You were saying something about calling her and always getting an answer. I don't think you ought to worry so," he soothed. "We haven't the least reason to think that anything's happened her. It couldn't be anything bad, or we'd know of it before now."

Augusta moved quietly out of the common parlor where she had been sitting by the window, and stood at the glass in the hall, putting on her coat. She had been in street dress and had evidently only been waiting for Wardwell to come in before she should go out.

"What have you eaten today?" Wardwell asked, trying to interpose the commonplace, for he was frightened at the strange suppressed quiet of the girl.

"I had my breakfast," she said, without turning.

"Yes, but it's 'long in the afternoon now. You mustn't think of going out without something. Come into the kitchen and we'll see if Ann hasn't some tea, or something."

"Will you make her eat, Misther Jimmie!" Ann appealed. "She's beyond me. Her worritin about Rose Wildin' that's as safe in the sthreet as a blessed child! Sure, she stepped into a neighbor's somewhere an' had a bite an' a chat. An' now, I'll bet ye what ye dare, she's calyin' over about Jimmie Hearn's, askin' the price o' things she don't want."

The big gaunt Irishwoman who ruled the kitchen of

the boarding house set them down at her own white table, while she drew tea and scolded:

"You're worse nor she is, Misther Jimmie, humorin' her."

But, with all her stout talk, it was plain to Wardwell that Ann had been listening to Augusta. She kept up a rattle of cheery scolding. She even hinted that the whole affair, for all they knew, might be some of Jimmie's own doing. She "wouldn't put it past him!" But, under it all, Wardwell saw that she was nervous.

Augusta, with a kind of forced obedience, was munching at a piece of bread when that straining, listening look came to her face again. Wardwell caught himself turning unconsciously to follow her gaze. He pulled himself back sharply, confused and half angry. But Augusta had not noticed.

With that same expectant, baffled look in her eyes, she rose quickly from the table and hurried out through the dark hall to the door, as though she followed a call which she could not quite hear or understand.

When Wardwell caught up with her on the street, except that she tacitly allowed him to fall into step beside her, she gave no sign of being aware of him.

He had a curious feeling, as they hurried through the street, of walking with a somnambulist. Yet the girl seemed entirely able to care for herself. He saw that she knew just where she was going, that she was aware of everything moving about her. Only, there was that strange, in-seeing, strained detachment about her, as though she were trying to look or listen into another world of sight and sound.

Here began those incredible nightmare days, and nights, when it seemed that they were forever in the street, hurrying, the girl leading, Wardwell a wholly useless body-guard following, from house to house of all the people who had known Rose Wilding. Then

came the fearful, timid questionings, at hospitals, at emergency wards, at police stations. And all the while Wardwell kept every newspaper office in town in a constant bad temper with his persistent prodding, by telephone.

Augusta did not go to the newspaper offices, either because she believed that Wardwell's acquaintance would get more attention than she could, or because she believed, as she had said in the beginning, that she herself must find her mother.

Then there were the worse times, when Wardwell, leaving Augusta peremptorily in the hands of Ann, went by himself on the last, gruesome, hopeless round. He did not tell Augusta that he was going to the morgue. He said nothing when he came back, gray of face and deathly quiet in spite of his every effort to hold up cheer. But Augusta knew where he had been, and what he had seen—and what he had not found.

As the days went on Jim Ray put his wits to the matter. It began to be baffling, and as a thing became puzzling just so Jim Ray's interest in it grew in proportion.

But in the end, he gave his verdict:

"She is not in this city, Wardwell. She must have left it by her own will, and in an ordinary way. Nothing else could have happened, I'd stake thirty years of work on it."

"But that's just what she wouldn't do! What she couldn't do! Why, she couldn't in her right mind walk off and leave her daughter!"

"Well," said Ray imperturbably, "that's just what fills newspapers—people doing what they couldn't and wouldn't."

So Wardwell saw that Jim Ray was ready to give up. And he knew that when Ray gave up a matter it meant that the resources of newspaper tracing had been

exhausted. To himself, he was willing to admit that Ray must be right. Rose Wilding, it seemed, must have gone out of the city in a quiet, commonplace way. But, walking the streets at Augusta's side, watching that tense, listening look upon her face, seeing her evidently straining for a sight or a voice that she could not quite get, he was again ready to believe with Augusta that Rose Wilding was near, that Augusta would find her.

There were days now when Augusta walked, as it seemed, aimlessly. There were no more definite places to be visited. She walked, Wardwell, with a dull pain of helplessness, dogged and uncomplaining at her side, through lower Fifth Avenue and University Place at the noon time when the thousands of women and girls spilled out from loft buildings and swarmed the sidewalks. Evening found her watching the cross streets from Broome to Fourteenth Street, searching excitedly the myriad faces of the crowds that move eastward to that world wonder of human hives, the great East Side.

One half of working Manhattan rides jammed, complaining, but submissive, to its wide flung homes. The other half walks, hurrying, stooping away from the setting sun, into that unexplored, uncounted medley of crowded tenements which lies beyond Second Avenue. It was the faces of these hurrying, jostling thousands that Augusta scanned desperately in the falling darkness of the cold November evenings. Until it was long past dark and the streams of people had begun to fail, they walked and watched.

But Wardwell, watching the girl, the weary, sharply cut look in her face, the pinched, thinning lines of her slender body as she walked home beside him, decided that this must stop. There could be but one end of it for the high strung, over-sensitized mind of the girl.

There was no one to whom he could appeal as having authority. So far as he had learned in the year which

he had lived in Mrs. Wilding's house, she had no relatives. But some one must soon take a way of stopping Augusta from this hopeless, unending search.

"We both know it's doing no good, Augusta. And you're breaking yourself down," he reasoned with her one morning, when three weeks of looking had given not the slightest clue to the whereabouts of her mother. "She will come back somehow, I am sure. And she mustn't come to find you a wreck. She'll be needing your care. Don't you think I'm right, little girl?"

"Of course, you're right, Mr. Jimmie. You're always right, now. And you've been so good to me. But I can't stop. I can't stop! She's getting farther and farther from me all the time, I must follow until I find her."

"But, child dear, you've done all that's within human power. Now we can only wait and hope." Jimmie was now the sobered gentleman, the tried and patient servitor always at her side. Neither of them knew how close to each other in sympathy and understanding they had come in these weeks. They had, in truth, been living in a world almost all by themselves with their search. The girl was ready to listen, to believe, to trust; but she could not promise obedience. "I'll stay in today, if I can," she promised. "But, if I hear her calling—"

With this he had to be content. And leaving her with Ann he went to his room, hoping to get some work done. His money was about gone. He must get some of the hated skits ready for the Sunday paper from which he drew a hand-to-mouth living.

In the middle of the forenoon he heard Ann's step pounding heavily up the stairs of the quiet house.

"She's away out again, Misther Jimmie!" the big woman panted. "I but shteped out the alley to the corner for an onion. An' I'm just back this blessed minute. An' she's away!"

Wardwell started for the door, but came back. "There's no use going out now," he said. "I wouldn't know where to look. Probably she has started off on some new thought. But about noon I'll know where to look for her. Don't worry, Ann; she's not in the least danger." But it was a confidence he was far from feeling, whatever his common sense might tell him.

Long before noon he was walking Fifth Avenue expecting to see Augusta upon her quest among the working women. But Augusta did not come. He went home, not knowing what else to do, and sat stupid and useless through the entire afternoon, waiting until it should be time to go to look for her in the places they had been haunting in the evenings of the last week or so.

Just as the dusk was gathering he heard her key in the door and ran down the stairs. She staggered into his arms in the hall and began to cry fearfully. They were the first tears that he had seen her cry in these weeks, and he did not know whether it was good or bad.

"Oh Jimmie, Jimmie," she cried, with the first direct appeal that she had made to him, "they wouldn't let me have her! They wouldn't let her come with me! I wanted to take her by the hand and bring her home. And they wouldn't—She wanted to come!—They wouldn't let me! Oh, Jimmie, they said she was a crazy woman! My darling good mamma! She isn't crazy, she just forgot.

"She said she was Rosie Dale—that was her name before she was married—and that she was eighteen. They had it in the book! And the man laughed!"

"Yes, yes, dear. No, no, of course not," Wardwell repeated soothingly as he carried her up to her mother's room. When Ann had brought her something to drink he sat down beside the lounge on which Augusta lay and began to question quietly.

"Tell Ann and me," he prompted, "just where you went first."

"To Bellevue. It came to my mind so strong. I just had to go there. And I begged and begged with the man who had the book, and then another man came, and at last they let me see the book myself. And there it was, Rosie Dale. You see she'd just forgotten. And I asked the man, and he laughed. He said she was sixty if she was a day! And she thought she was eighteen! They brought her there from a hat factory. She used to make hats when she first came to New York, a young girl. I know it all now."

"And then?" questioned Wardwell quietly.

"Oh, Jimmie, that was more than a week ago. They took her there for 'observation.' Nobody knew anything about her. And they sent her to Ward's Island.

"I went there over the cold, black water. Oh! it was so cold and so black. But I didn't care, I was going to get my darling mother.

"But they wouldn't let me go to her. They said it wasn't the day. And one man was so cruel. He said people ought to take better care of their folks. And, oh, it wasn't my fault! Was it, Jimmie?"

"No, no, child, of course not."

"And then they did let me into the place. And I waited and waited. And then I saw a door open, and I looked in.

"Oh Jimmie, a great big room! And all the most terrible people, looking so queer, and talking to themselves! And, Jimmie, I said: 'That's *Hell* in there!'

"And then, Oh! Over in a far corner, my poor darling mamma, crouching, her back turned to the rest!

"Oh Jimmie, Jimmie! She didn't know me at all! But she isn't crazy! You *know* she isn't! She's just forgotten.

"They took me away. They said I couldn't have,

her. They said I was only a little girl. Where was my father? Didn't I have any brothers?

"And so they said—It was the head doctor now—He said I couldn't have her, I wasn't of age, I couldn't make a home for her.

"Then they—He said if I was married and had a husband and a home I could have her. That was the only way.

"Can that be so, Jimmie? Can that be so? Is that the only way I can take her out of that place and have her? Have I got to be married to have her with me? Have I got to be married?"

"Why, no," said Jimmie, rising sharply and striding across the room. "Why no, certainly, of—of—course not—*of course not!*"

Then he turned to meet the brilliant, half hysterical, pleading eyes of the girl fixed full upon him.

"Of course not. Of course—" he murmured, sitting down again.

II

AUGUSTA's question was still ringing in Wardwell's ears the next morning, as they stood near the bow of the "Thomas J. Brennan" shivering in the driving spray of the East River. He had gone out late last night to look up a lawyer friend. He had learned that what had been told Augusta yesterday was practically correct. Short of having a good deal of money, there was no way in which she could have her mother's "commitment" set aside except by having a husband and the surety of a home.

He had not told Augusta what he had learned, and he knew that she was bringing him over here today in the hope that he, or they combined, could induce the hospital people to let her mother go home with her. He knew that it was impossible, that they could do nothing. But he had come because Augusta would have come anyway, and he could not see her facing it alone.

At the Island dock "Johnnie the Horse" met them, and prancing up to Augusta motioned her to get into the little wagon to which he had himself hitched. Wardwell had heard of this harmless lunatic, had heard the reporters laughing over his antics. But now when he looked at him gambolling about, a great horse's tail bobbing from his coat to carry out the crazy delusion that he was a horse, he suddenly hated him. And he cringed inwardly, thinking of Augusta having to come and go through this. Why did they not keep such things out of sight? He pushed roughly past the big gangling lunatic and hurried Augusta along. But the fellow pranced grotesquely along beside them, saying:

"You needn't mind me. I'm only Johnnie the Horse. See me! I'm a horse! Look at me!"

Some one called to him and he turned back. But Wardwell, feeling the tremor in Augusta's arm, swore that she must not be allowed to go through this. He did not know what he would do. There seemed to be nothing that he could do.

They brought the patient out to where Wardwell and Augusta sat. They had not been able to find clothes to fit the large woman. The sight of her, untidy, forlorn, the great hopeless wreck of her shapely, competent self, brought a fresh shudder to Wardwell. He dared not look at Augusta.

"You know me this morning, don't you, mamma?"

"Oh yes, daughter, of course, of course." The big woman gently disengaged herself from Augusta's clinging embrace and turned to where she had caught a glimpse of Wardwell.

"Oh, Mr. Jimmie, is it you? I thought of you when they didn't come to find me. But I couldn't think of the place. I got lost, it seems. My memory's not as good as it was. And every day I was looking for a sight of my little daughter Augusta coming to look for me. But I wouldn't like her to see me here.

"Why, mamma darling," the girl broke in, "I'm your Augusta! I'm your daughter. You called me daughter yesterday. Don't you know me today?"

"Yes, daughter, hush; yes, to be sure."

Rose Wilding drew quietly away, leaving Augusta dazed and heart sick. A fear more terrible than all—that her mother did not know her at all, would never know her—fell black upon her. True, her mother had called her "daughter." But she remembered that Rose Wilding had always had a habit of calling every girl daughter. Every girl in the neighborhood had been daughter with her.

The big woman took Wardwell by the hand and led him aside into a corner of the room.

"They're all like that here," she explained in a cautious whisper. Every one of them thinks she's somebody else. I suppose the poor thing heard me speak of my daughter, and it wandered into her head that she was the one. And you might as well humor them. It does them no harm. You never can tell what they'll think of next. God help all that's afflicted!"

"But, that is your Augusta," said Wardwell.

"Now, Mr. Jimmie, you know you're always at you nonsense!" Rose Wilding answered, smiling slowly at him.

Now, curiously enough, it was that smile that brought the perspiration to Wardwell's forehead. It was the sane, deep, slowbreaking smile of Rose Wilding herself, the smile that had won the heart and the confidence of every child in every poor family of the parish. They knew her all, the big woman, the big woman of the smiling eyes, the mother heart, the never empty hand. There was Rose Wilding herself, in that smile. And yet, and yet—Wardwell reached at his tightening collar—there was a something else, a something deeper, farther away, elusive. And there was poor little stricken Augusta, standing alone in the middle of the room. He could see the sharp pink tips of her nails cutting into the palms of her hands as she fought back the bursting tears.

The blood rushed back into his heart and he felt himself gasping as a man does when he takes the leap in a desperate, cold dive. He did not know whether he was a good man or not. He did not know whether he was kind or cruel. But he knew that he had the answer to Augusta's question of the night before.

He loved Augusta with a love which had deepened in these weeks from a boy's harum-scarum affection into

the deep, tender, protecting love of a man. He loved her, and would have given his life to save her the anguish of having to leave her mother in this place. Yet, he knew that it was unfair, wrong, unnatural. For her mother's sake, Augusta would sacrifice herself and marry *any* man. Wardwell knew it. Being Augusta, there was no choice for her. It was cruel, an outrage on her brave girlhood. But—So help him God!—he'd try to see that she never suffered from it.

Thus Wardwell of the funny sheet.

He nodded quietly to Augusta to leave the room. She went, strangely obedient to the look in his eyes. Then he turned to Rose Wilding.

"Now, Mrs. Wilding," he said easily, "Augusta and I are going to be married right away so that you can come home and live with us."

Rose Wilding sat down easily, smiling broadly. She seemed at ease once Augusta had left the room. "It wouldn't do for you to be in this place long, Mr. Jimmie," she said, "if it acts that way on you."

She was so like herself in her answer, so sane, so unruffled and ready, that Wardwell forgot the place where they were, and why they were there, and began to argue earnestly.

"Sounds funny, doesn't it? But then, it needn't. I don't have to play the fool always. And if Augusta cared enough for me—"

Rose Wilding sat up with a sharp movement. Wardwell could see the jealous, protecting mother-light in her eyes, as she questioned sternly:

"Just what has been going on?"

"Nothing," said Jimmie honestly. "I have not spoken a word to Augusta."

"Then it is just one other bit of your nonsense," she said with an air that dropped the matter altogether.

And Wardwell let it stand so. For a moment he had

thought that he ought to try to make her understand. But he suddenly felt the hopelessness of it. It would not do any good. If she could understand, she would never give her consent. And it might do her great harm to let her be bothered and excited at this time. He and Augusta would have to face the problem out for themselves. A sudden wave of overpowering tenderness came breaking over him, so that he never knew what he said at leaving Rose Wilding.

He found Augusta out in a long, black corridor, looking from a window down across the dreary face of the water. She was so pathetically little, so tender, so sensitive, so delicately fashioned for pain! With a queer mingling of emotions, he found himself praying that she might be spared; and at the same time almost cursing himself because he was not a better man, more worthy of her.

On the boat they were practically alone. And as they stood out near the open prow, watching the cold drift of the spray as it broke over the bow, they saw the busy slits of streets sliding by, saw men and women how they hurried about their own business, saw that no one had time for thought of anything but that which concerned himself in the way of living.

And I think it came to both these two, at the same moment, how really alone they were out of all the world. Their doings or their thoughts were of no account to anyone. And in the weeks a common thought, an anxiety shared, had drawn them together, had almost made them forget that there was a world around them.

Suddenly Augusta shivered and cowered against Wardwell's arm.

"I can't," she moaned brokenly. "I can never stand it! I shall go mad so they'll have to put me in there too! And I know that if they'd only let me have Mamma

she'd get all better and know me. If she was only at home, she'd remember everything!

Wardwell put his arm gently around her shoulder.

"I didn't mean to say it this way, dear," he said softly. "But I think you know what I feel. I probably wouldn't be much good, but I'd *serve*."

Augusta turned to look gravely up at him. It was a new and strange Wardwell this, serious and humble. He was so downright and simple, so clear in his boyish honesty; she had not the slightest question. He meant just what he said. He wanted her.

She reached up quietly and, taking his big blond face in her little hands, kissed him deliberately on the lips.

Wardwell was astonished, frightened almost, by the steady, instant decision of the girl's way. He had expected to plead, to reason, to argue her into giving way to him—while all the time he would be doubting, whether it was right. But she had taken decision out of her own wise heart. And Jimmy Wardwell had never again a thought but that it was the right decision.

They stood a little while clinging to each other, entirely untroubled by any part of the world that might be looking on or interesting itself.

Then Wardwell began to count the practical things.

"We'll have to see your priest, I suppose that's the first thing."

"Yes, Fr. Davis. But he will know that I am right," she answered easily. "Maybe he will have to go to the Cardinal's. But he will know that it's for Mamma. He knows her so well, and how good she's always been to everybody. He would do anything for her, I know he will."

At the ferry house Wardwell announced that they would ride across town in a taxicab.

"I'm on my way to be married," he proclaimed to the general world. "I've got to start right."

The strain of the weeks seemed to have lifted from him. And although he knew that there were difficulties ahead, he was in the mood to consider them all met and vanquished. He was, in fact, Wardwell himself again. Augusta saw the mood, knew that his feeling was largely intended to make a hard place easy for her, and she was willing to fall in with it, to a certain extent.

"You musn't spend all of your two dollars, Jimmie. You know you'll have a lot of expenses."

"Who said two dollars? I've got more than two dollars. I've got investments, mining stocks, real wealth. I've got friends—I can borrow, potential wealth. I've got a headful of jokes, and jokes without heads, or tails; all wealth. And, if all these will not suffice, I've got—*a dress suit!*" he wound up in a hoarse dramatic whisper, looking warily around to see that his admission was not caught by any who might have avaricious designs toward the suit.

"Yes, but you'll need the dress suit."

"Not at all," he contended furiously. "We'll be married early in the morning, when I couldn't possibly wear the thing. I wouldn't feel respectable."

"I insist on the dress suit," Augusta said firmly. "So, come,"—she was leading him towards the cross-town car—, "I'll pay the fares, so you can save the whole two dollars for some mighty extravagance."

"I suppose you're beginning the tyranny. But I haven't got the will to resist. This is married life, I suppose," he grumbled as he followed her to the car.

"I wonder who teaches them to begin right from the beginning? Anyhow, it's going to be a success," he groaned as he sat down beside her. "I can feel it right from the start. Already I'm subdued, tamed, tractable!"

"You are a kind, dear gentleman," said Augusta with a sudden gentle look up at him. And Wardwell went strangely silent.

At home, they found opposition where they had least looked for it. Ann set herself vigorously against the whole plan. She denounced Wardwell as a scheming villian taking advantage of Augusta's youth and ignorance.

"Not one foot further," she asserted stoutly, "will the scheme go. I'll stop it myself. I'll not stand by and see you profit from the poor lamb's trouble." She stood in her kitchen, where her will was the law of the land, and defied Wardwell foot and horse. "I always mis-doubted your right sense, with your skylarking. But now I know you were only playing the fool to cover your villainy. Any man that would think of such a thing!"

"But he didn't think of it, Ann," said Augusta quickly, "I—"

"I think we'd better wait to know what the priest says, Ann," Wardwell cut in quickly. "Surely you won't go against what he says is right."

To this Ann had no answer, except to mutter that no priest in his right mind would have anything to do with such a thing.

In the sombre old parish house in Sixteenth Street an austere and quiet man listened with sympathy to Augusta, and studied Wardwell. He knew Rose Wilding. He knew that there was no other way in which she could be brought home to the love and care which she would need. But the responsibility of asking a dispensation for the immediate marriage of these two children, as they seemed to him, was one that he did not care to undertake.

In the end, in answer to Augusta's pleading, he said slowly:

"I do not know. I feel that I am not wise enough to advise. But I will send you to the Chancellor himself. He can give you an instant answer, which I could not."

"Serves me right," said Wardwell, when they were in the street again. "If I could have told him that I had a regular job, he'd have listened to me. The best I could say was that I was trying to write. And he was too polite to tell me that all the people in the United States that have ever been in high school, and plenty that haven't, are trying that—or have tried it.

"You *can* write, Jimmie," said Augusta sincerely. And then she smiled. "But you look so cherubically young!"

"I'm twenty-four!" he exploded.

"And look nineteen, and, sometimes—"

"Act fourteen, eh? That's right, let's fight. That'll soon bring the wrinkles to my alabaster brow. And then you'll be satisfied."

"We wont fight ever, Jimmie," said Augusta gently as she took his arm and fell into step with him.

The Chancellor received them promptly when he had read the note of introduction and explanation which they had brought from the priest. He was an extremely busy man whose work it was, day after day, year after year, to give quick decisions which he knew must affect the lives and happiness of individual men and women. But in most of these decisions he had no discretion. He had but to have the facts, and state the inflexible law that governed him.

This, however, was a matter in which no law tied his hands. Neither was there any law to direct his action. He had only his own human judgment to tell him whether what these two young people wished to do was wise and right, or whether a sacrifice was not being made by one or both of them which was not justifiable. They were free, of course; but he was convinced from Augusta's manner that if the Church would not sanction the marriage, then Augusta would not be married.

He listened until Augusta had told her full story.

He asked Wardwell a question or two. He sat awhile in thought. Then he arose quickly and walked into another room.

Wardwell's trained reporter's ears noted that the Chancellor was telephoning. When they had repeated to him the word Eminence twice or three times, his mind recorded mechanically that the Chancellor was talking to the Cardinal. But he was not thinking of it. He was watching the look in Augusta's eyes. For a little time back, while they had been talking, he had noticed that she was troubled and perplexed. He felt that the difficulties and doubts that were being put in their way were worrying her, perhaps making her less sure than she had been that they were doing right. And he felt himself wishing that they could have gone straight to the license clerk, like other couples. But he knew something of how Augusta felt about the matter, and he would not think of asking her to do anything that would hurt her.

Now she was sitting leaning forward in that listening, straining attitude, with that same deep, unconscious yearning in her eyes which he had seen in the weeks of torturing search. As well as if she had told him, he knew that she had forgotten him and the place where she was, to listen to the call of her mother.

When they heard the priest's step coming back into the room, Wardwell saw the look in her eyes turn suddenly to one of quick, happy assurance. She looked up at the Chancellor as he came toward them, and Wardwell could see that there was not the slightest doubt or fear in her mind but that everything was right for them.

"I have spoken with the Cardinal," the Chancellor said quickly. "He wishes to see you both. He is the young lady's pastor, the Parish Priest of New York. It is just a step around to the Avenue. You will go

there, please," he said as they got to their feet. To Wardwell, as he took his hand at parting, he added:

"Because you are strange to us, young man, you may be thinking that unusual difficulties are being put in your way. But, you are intelligent, you know that we are thinking of just one thing, the life happiness of this young girl and of you."

"I know that," said Wardwell simply, shaking hands.

In a little room, as simple and unadorned as the quiet grace of his own bearing, the Parish Priest of New York received them and began to question Augusta.

Wardwell, listening, found himself forgetting somewhat of the business in hand and absorbed suddenly in his own particular business. He was a born writer and novelist, in spite of his own jibes. And, just as the true artist finds himself forever reaching for a brush, he could never be in the presence of character without trying to grasp at the one vital element which was the spring of it.

He had seen and studied power in many men, preachers, demagogues, statesmen, men of the business that is called big. He knew that there was but one individual in the world who could speak an authoritative word to more people than could this quiet-spoken, ageing man before him. But a sense of power was not the dominating impression which he got. There was something fuller, more complete than mere power. There was a sense of ripeness, of comprehension, of—of *understanding*. He had the word at last. The Parish Priest of New York—that was it. If this man were the pastor of a little country place he would know and understand every man, woman and child in it. Here, he was as near to every soul of the millions that looked to him as he was to the little girl who now sat before him telling him why she wanted to be married.

"I think you have realized already, child, that mar-

riage must not be undertaken for any but the one motive. That you should wish to marry in order to care for your mother is very good in you, but it is not enough either for you or for the man whom you would marry."

"Yes, but it is right for me to marry Jimmie, I know it is right, Your Eminence."

"Could you tell me how you know?" the Cardinal probed gently.

Augusta did not answer. She looked straight towards the Cardinal, but he realized at once that she did not see him, that her vision went beyond him to someone or something to which she was evidently appealing for her answer. He saw her look change from one of pleading, bewildered question to one of instant, calmed assurance. The great man, watching the girl's face, was struck with the conviction that some one had spoken to the girl. He almost caught himself listening, as though the words might be escaping him.

When she spoke there was a matter-of-fact directness in her strange words that was so simple as to be startling.

"My mother's spirit," she said quietly, "is not bound by that body, by that place. She speaks to me. She tells me that it is right. I know."

The Parish Priest of New York looked gravely at the girl for a moment. Then he turned to look up through the unshaded window into the clear breadth of sky that showed so high above the city's walls. From bedside to confessional he had gone his round these many years past. And he had learned that there is more of the spirit in the teeming streets, in the crowded tenements, of the city than ever was in the open places, if one but had the vision and the ear for it. He had seen and heard many things for which he had not accounted.

Suddenly he turned to Wardwell, saying:

"Why do you wish to marry the young lady?"

"Because I love her," Wardwell answered so promptly and bluntly that the Cardinal smiled.

Were you ever baptized in any church?" the latter asked, after a little pause.

"I do not think so."

"Have you heard, perhaps, that I have personally very strong objection to my people marrying those who are not Catholics?"

"I have heard you say it. Your Eminence must understand," Wardwell explained, "that some reporter hears nearly everything that you say in public."

"I am glad to know that that is your business," the Cardinal said briefly. "Some of my best friends through long years have been newspaper men of this town. They are men of wide and sympathetic understanding. Now," he went on, "has it occurred to you that I have probably good reasons for opposing such marriages as the one for which you ask?"

"I do not doubt you have good reasons, your Eminence."

"What might you think to be one of them?"

"I suppose there's enough to fight about," said Wardwell promptly—so promptly that he saw the Cardinal smiling, and felt himself blushing furiously under the boyish white skin.

"You seem to have acquired a working knowledge," said the aged man with his smile, "of—But let us hope that it is not so bad as you have been led to believe. There are other reasons, several of them," he continued in a different tone. "You will find them all good. But back of them all there is a very human, very practical one. It is this. The Catholic party considers himself bound until death by a divine law. The other party, in practice, hardly ever considers himself bound by anything but the law of the land, and a certain vague sense

of justice. It is never fair," he ended gravely. "Never a fair partnership."

Wardwell was silent, thinking of the matter in a light in which it had not, as a fact, ever occurred to him. He knew well enough that the average man in his position would not and did not think that he bound himself to anything beyond that which was the custom of the society in which he lived.

"I will only ask you to remember and think of this, Mr. Wardwell. To a man of just mind it is well worth thinking of always. My secretary," he went on, as he touched a button, "will prepare the papers. You can then go to the city clerk and to your priest. If you should need help," he added to Augusta in parting, "in the matter of bringing your mother home, I hope that you will command me."

The secretary, a young priest with the face of a big, solemn eyed boy, came and conducted them to an outer office.

When they were again in the street, Wardwell faced Augusta and asked:

"Did you ever think of that, what the Cardinal said at the last?"

"No, I did not," she answered. "It wouldn't affect us at all, Jimmie?"

She had spoken so quickly and confidently that Wardwell thought that she had not understood what the Cardinal had said. But the next moment he knew that he was entirely mistaken. Augusta understood and accepted everything with steady, unflinching eyes.

She said:

"I'd never wish to keep even a kitten that wanted to go away from me."

In the evening of the day that they were married, Rose Wilding came home with them.

Augusta had managed to dress her into the outward semblance of her old self. And in everything but the subject of Augusta she seemed reasonable. That subject they did not press upon her. And when she wondered why her little daughter had not come to bring her, they merely said that Augusta would be waiting for her at home.

Augusta had made absolutely no changes in the house, trusting that the presence in its own place of every remembered thing would awaken in her mother the sense of security and home. And for a little time, as she watched her mother walking slowly about her own room, touching a curtain here, a pillow there, as had been always her busy way, the girl felt sure that it was going to have just that effect.

But she observed that her mother soon became restless. She kept glancing over her shoulder and sidewise at Augusta who sat in her own little low chair which from childhood had been her favorite seat, just below the big red post of her mother's bed. She was remembering now how it used to be the greatest glory of her day to sit and watch with adoring eyes the combing out of her mother great waves of wonderful dark brown hair. It was snow white now, but still abundant and strangely beautiful.

"Mamma," she said suddenly, "let me take your hair down and run it through my fingers. Remember, you used to say it always took away a headache."

Rose Wilding looked suspiciously over her shoulder. What was running in the poor disordered mind it is hard to say. But when she turned she spoke kindly and quietly.

"Don't you think it's time you were going back, child? Wont they be missing you—there?"

Poor Augusta's heart turned sick with failure. She threw herself down kneeling at her mother's feet, begging and crying:

"Mamma, mamma darling can't you remember! Try to remember. I'm your Augusta! Your little daughter! Augusta! *Augusta!*" she cried hysterically, trying in pitiful futility to pierce the cloud of her mother's mind by sheer loudness.

But Rose Wilding only smiled with a gentle patience, and lifted her up, petting her.

"There there, daughter, hush now, hush. I'll let you stay here. Though I wonder that they'd allow it."

Augusta ran out of the room and came down the long hall to the common sitting room, where she found Wardwell at the table reading. She fell into a chair at his side and dropped her head upon his arm where it lay extended on the table.

"Jimmie, Jimmie," she cried miserably, "it's no use! I've failed, failed!"

"No you haven't either," said Jimmie quickly, as he raised her head and lifted her face up to him. "Of course there's always a fly in the icebox, kid. But no one has ever failed when he's done all his part as you have. And at least you have her here where you can make her comfortable and can know what's happening to her."

"I know, Jimmie, I'm happy even for that. But I was so sure, so sure that she'd know me and be better right away."

"She is better," said Jimmie stoutly. "Her mind is at rest, except about you. She is not able to place you. There is something about you that she has never seen before. She does not know you."

He stopped short, struck by a sudden thought as he looked down with quick intensity upon the golden shot circle of Augusta's head and into the deep, pain clouded eyes.

When he spoke it was in the slow, rising voice of one who struggles toward a new and amazing conviction.

"She is right," he said in a low voice. "You are not her Augusta."

"Why Jimmie, Jimmie," the girl cried in a trembling voice. "Are you——? What can you mean?"

Wardwell seeing the quick leap of anguish in her eyes hurried to say lightly:

"Nothing at all, as per usual. Only, you see, when she went away, you were a little girl with a little curl. And now—she can't understand it—the little girl is a—woman."

Augusta put her hand softly into Wardwell's palm and said gently, soberly:

"Your woman."

Wardwell started as though a hot iron had touched him. The homely expression, in the way she had put it, and meant it, the gentle dignity of her complete surrender, went to his heart, and flashed up into his brain the revelation of the heart holiness that this little girl had brought today to the ceremony which, after all, had meant so little to him.

He closed his hand blindly over the little hand that lay in his, and bowed his head.

A slight rustling noise came from the hall, and Augusta leaping from her chair ran hastily from the room and down the hall.

She was in time to look through the railing of the stairs and see her mother disappearing down the stairs. She saw her mother look back in a frightened, furtive way; saw that she recognized her; and then saw that she turned to flee from her.

Augusta put her arm out blindly to the wall and leaned against it.

"Go, Jimmie, quick," she moaned. "She'd never come back for me. She'd only run faster and farther. She's running away—Running away from *me*."

Wardwell hurried down the stairs, and Augusta

leaning over the railing heard him as he caught up with her mother on the lower landing.

"Surely," she heard him arguing genially, "you're not going out this kind of a night! It's going to rain cats and dogs in another five minutes."

"I can't stay here." The girl heard the hurried whisper. "It's that girl. They've set her here to watch me."

"No such thing!" Wardwell contended. "She's here—" His voice suddenly dropped to a whisper which Augusta could not understand. She listened with painful tenseness, but she could distinguish no words. After a little, however, she knew that Jimmie's talk was more steady—almost continuous; while her mother's whispers became hesitating and infrequent. Jimmie was winning. Augusta knew just what he was doing. He was telling one prodigious and consequential lie after another, until the poor fumbling mind with which he was contending should be completely turned around and would give in to his bidding like a bewildered child. She choked and almost cried aloud, for the pity of it, though she knew that Jimmie was doing the only thing possible. Then her mind wandered for a moment to another thought, and for an instant she trembled in a cold grip of fear. Would Jimmie ever, for any reason, find it necessary to use his—facility—upon herself.

At last she heard her mother laugh. Jimmie had won!

She ran quickly into her mother's sitting room and into the bedroom, shutting the door softly behind her. Then she went on into her own little room, which was fitted into a jutting corner of the building, and threw herself down on the bed. She did not know what she was going to do, but ever since Jimmie had said that, about her mother going away and leaving her a little girl, an idea had been crowding into her mind.

She heard her mother and Wardwell at the hall door

and heard her mother inviting Jimmie into the sitting room for a little chat. Wardwell had always been a favorite with her mother, and she spoke in just the friendly, kindly way she would have spoken in the old days.

Then she heard her mother come into the big bedroom, probably to put down her hat and shawl. When Rose Wilding had gone out and shut the bedroom door, Augusta thought and acted quickly.

She drew from under her own bed the little old cot on which she had slept until she was a big girl. Carrying it out into the big room she carefully set it up at the foot of her mother's bed, where it had stood until Augusta had come to the dignity of a room of her own. Then, bringing bedding for it and fixing it in the old way, she undressed quickly and curled herself into it.

Through the closed door, in the silence of the house, for it was the time when nearly all the boarders were out, she could hear plainly nearly every word said in the outer room.

The rain—it had actually begun to rain a little—was on Wardwell's mind apparently, for he began a fresh story with:

"Do you remember the time of the Flood, Mrs. Wilding?"

"Well—not quite, Mr. Jimmie." And Augusta could almost feel her mother's amused chuckle through the dark. She had always loved fun. And although she herself did not talk a great deal she had always liked to hear the laughter and nonsense of young folks around her.

"Well, you know, that time, McCarty was up a tree. And along comes Noah, sailing, decks awash, and the rain pouring down in gutters.

"'Are ye takin' anny Irish this trip, Sor?' says McCarty.

"Noah looks at him with a weary eye. Says he, sorrowfully:

"I am a sea-faring man, by preoccupation. I have on board two thousand, three hundred eighty one married couples. The name of this ship is TROUBLE. Irish—' he muttered '—Irish?'

"Oh, have a heart, Noah," says McCarty. 'Sure wan more can do little harm. Take me on.'

"I wont," says Noah.

"You oant?" says McCarty.

"I wont," says Noah.

"Well, ye can go to Blazes—It's only a shower, annyway."

Augusta, hysterically stuffing the bed clothes against her mouth, heard her mother's hearty, pleasant laugh ring out. And for an instant she thought that her own little play was real; that she was, indeed, the little girl of other years lying in her cot and listening to the grown folks in the other room.

Then her own laughter turned, as laughter will, to hot, choking tears of fear and trepidation that burned her throat.

The talk outside ran on pleasantly, naturally; just such an hour as Wardwell and one or two others of the boarders had often spent with her mother. Wardwell loved to tell stories, to run on about himself, about his lack of money—it was a tradition of the house, founded probably on his own authority, that he had but three socks, one of which he washed every night—about the scrapes which he was constantly getting into and getting out of. He never laughed at the end of one of his own tales, but always before beginning one he would break out with a short, provoking laugh to himself, as though he had just heard a good thing.

It was all so natural, so real, that Augusta, her mind unconsciously relaxing from the strains of the day,

caught herself almost falling asleep. She heard one after another of the boarders come up the stairs and stop for a moment, at the door of the room where the two chatted, for a rather timid and curious word or two with the mistress of the house. But with Rose Wilding there was nothing except the usual and the ordinary. She was in her own house, her own room, doing as she had done on any other evening. Her house was making it's orderly, routine way to bed.

Finally Wardwell rose, saying:

"Well, Mrs. Wilding, it's time honest folk were in bed, and all rogues were turned out. I'm going before I'm turned out."

"Oh, Mr. Jimmie, there's worse than you in the world. But I suppose it's late. I *am* tired."

Augusta heard the door close behind Wardwell, and her mother came straight to the bedroom door and pushed it wide open. The full light from the door fell straight across the cot where Augusta lay.

She did not stir, pretending to be asleep. She heard her mother's startled gasp of joy. Then she heard her hurry to the outer door and call to Wardwell:

"Oh, Mr. Jimmie, Mr. Jimmie, come back! Come back!"

Wardwell came running back, and Rose Wilding in a choking whisper told him:

"My little darling! My little Pigeon-pie! She's here! She's here, just where I left her! Oh, Dear Heart of God, how I missed her! Come and see, she's sleeping," she whispered.

Wardwell came quietly with her to the door and looked in rather timidly. He did not know quite what to expect.

He saw a little cot, and curled up in it there was what seemed a little girl sleeping. Her loose, tumbling hair had fallen all about the face, and one little hand—a

hand upon which there was no ring—held a strand of it, as though the little girl had been playing with her hair when she fell asleep.

He knew it was his wife. But, remembering his own first startled impression, he did not wonder that Rose Wilding, her mind straying in its pain, had gone back through the years to the little Augusta that had been.

Rose Wilding went gently over to the cot and knelt beside it whispering softly. Wardwell stole out of the room and closed the outer door quietly behind him.

Augusta scarcely dared breathe while her mother knelt bending over her. Her little play had succeeded, so far as to set her mother's heart at ease for the moment, but she was in mortal terror of what the effect would be if her mother should realize that she was being deceived.

After what seemed an eternity of anxiety, she heard her mother rise, go out quietly, lock the hall door, and turn out the light. Then she came back and moved about quietly in the dark, preparing for bed.

She did not come to the cot again but got quietly into bed, and in a few minutes Augusta listening to her breathing knew that she had fallen asleep almost instantly like a tired, contented child.

When she was sure that her mother was sleeping soundly, Augusta rose, found a dressing robe and slippers, and stole like a thief out into the hall.

Wardwell was in the common sitting room, alone. He did not hear her coming. He was reading, and she stood a moment in the doorway looking at him, before she said:

"Jimmie."

He looked up and said, as though he had the words all ready studied and framed:

"That was nothing less than inspiration, dear."

"I do not know," said Augusta hesitatingly. "I was very frightened. Is it—right?"

"Yes, said Wardwell simply. "It's right. However it is in the daytime, when you're dressed, she'll never leave this house so long as she hopes to find you there, like that, at night."

"Then—Good night, Jimmie."

"Good night, dear."

She turned away a step or two. Then she turned quickly back to the door and said:

"Jimmie."

"Yes, dear."

"Sometime, when you need it badly, God is going to be *very* good to you."

And she was gone.

III

ROSE WILDING did not rise from her bed the next day, nor, in the daytime, for many days. When she had come home in the evening she had looked, to the casual eye, as robust as ever. But in the morning it was plain that she had fallen into a complete mental and physical collapse.

It seemed that she must have gone on upon the sheer strength of terror and worry, until, once finding the little girl, as she thought, the stimulus was gone; and her strength and her interest in life had gone with it. She lay all day like one in a partial doze, evidently not asleep, but paying no attention to anybody or anything about her. Augusta she noticed not at all, except to take from her the food that she brought and to submit passively to her tidying and washing. Wardwell she recognized with a brief, passing glimmer of her old flashing smile, but not even he could arouse her more than momentarily. To her own doctor, whom Augusta had called in, she answered quietly, and without seeming to think that any other explanation was necessary, that she was resting and that she did not think that she would get up.

At night when the house had settled into its bedtime quiet, Augusta stole into the little cot at the foot of her mother's bed, and waited.

After a little she heard her mother stir softly in the bed, and then heard her get stealthily out to the floor. She came straight to the little cot, and, as she knelt by it, Augusta could feel her warm breath upon her own tumbled hair. Then, satisfied, she stole softly back into bed and went sound asleep.

This was the first day of the new life for Augusta. And every day that followed through the fall and winter was exactly like it. It seemed that Rose Wilding lived through the day just waiting for the night to come, that she might steal from her bed to find her little girl. She never spoke to Augusta except to answer a direct question. She submitted in a gentle, kindly way to Augusta's every ministration. She smiled at Wardwell and always knew him. But when he would time and again, indicating Augusta, ask who this girl was, she always answered with a deprecating "Hush!" and a pitying glance at Augusta which said plainly that he should not ask, that he knew well enough where the girl had come from and he ought to know better than to hurt her feelings by bringing it up. He asked the question often in a good-hearted effort to make her realize that this was Augusta. But, one day, after he had asked it, he saw Augusta's face as she caught her mother's sidelong look. He did not ask the question again.

Gradually the three settled to an acceptance of the state of affairs as they existed in the mind of Rose Wilding. By day, Augusta was the girl that had followed Rose Wilding from "that place." At night, the little Augusta came from somewhere and slept in her place at the foot of her mother's bed.

The change that came over Rose Wilding was one that to the outer eye was wholly inexplicable. Though that there was a change was plain to the most casual look. Probably it was to the casual, unconcerned eye that the change was most startling.

One day, when Rose Wilding had been some weeks at home, a new boarder, a Mrs. Barron, a nervous, high-strung, over-worked woman, head of department in one of the great retail stores, came into the sitting room to speak to Augusta. She glanced accidentally

into the bedroom and straight into the eyes of Rose Wilding whom she had never before seen.

Mrs. Barron fainted.

Augusta and Wardwell, accustomed to seeing Rose Wilding day by day, could not realize the extent of the change that had come over her. To them she was today practically as she had been yesterday. But to a stranger the picture of the large handsome woman, her face blanched now by hidden disease to a transparent pearl white, the skin smooth and unlined as a growing baby's, her pallor doubled by the white of the bed and the enamel that covered every object in the room, was in all a sight to arouse a nameless, creeping dread of something present but unseen.

Augusta had taken a few months of hospital training during the year past, and her care of her mother became not only a cult and a religion but almost a fanatical passion. She had turned the room into her ideal of a hospital room. She had painted and enamelled everything so that all could be scrubbed and washed down with disinfectants. She would have nothing in the room that was not a pure white. She dressed the bed and her mother in the snowiest things she could lay hand to.

The effect was not at all what she had had in mind. To herself, living as she did so close to her mother, the room was just the cheeriest and sweetest abode that could be made for a beloved sick one. But her mother's wondering, childlike eyes, as they looked out unseeing from under the circle of completely blanched hair above them upon the room that was now her world, did not have the look familiar to the sick room. They were eyes that looking, and seeing not, yet dealt with strange thing that showed through a curtain.

Augusta, from long watching, from unending longing and perpetual defeat, had worn thin the coarser mate-

rial covering that held the living, burning spirit within her. As her mother seemed to remove day by day into deeper and deeper places of the soul's isolation, Augusta seemed ever to follow her.

Wardwell, standing by his wife with the feeling of a strange man watching over a girl baby left suddenly and unaccountably to his care and at the same time with the hunger of a young lover for his sweetheart's first kisses, thought, and thought often, that she was going away from him.

She was unfailingly dear and thoughtful. The moments which she could snatch for him from the ever increasing care of her mother she filled with anxious and touching tenderness. Every day brought him a new and revealing sense of the depth of her spirit and affection. But the feeling of being separated from her came pressing upon him with a twofold weight.

In the day time she played her part as the girl who had come from "that place" with Rose Wilding, while Wardwell looked on heart sick with sympathy for the pain that he knew she carried and with a withering sense of his own uselessness. She played a part. But she played the part so well in her self-effacing patience that he was finding it necessary to remind himself that she was playing a part. It came to the point where he at times caught himself walking rapidly up and down his room and arguing with himself whether this was really his Augusta, or whether he, too, was losing his grip on reality.

At night, when she was away from his sight and he knew that she had gone back into the little Augusta of Rose Wilding's memory, it was, if anything, worse. Here he knew she played a willing part, trying to make the part a reality. For Wardwell knew the daring of her mind and the greatness of her desire; knew that she would stop at nothing, would grasp at every thread of

memory that could possibly draw her mother's mind across the vacant wilderness between the present and the past.

But even this double barrier of outward isolation from the Augusta who was his was not the great thing that he feared. The look which he had seen in Augusta's face in the days when they were hunting the city for her mother, that strained, listening look that took her away from him and from everything about them, was often in her eyes now. Somehow he knew that in it she spoke to the spirit of Rose Wilding that wandered in the unknown places.

He did not resent the state of things. But he found himself unaccountably peevish and unwontedly tempted to self pity.

He did not know what was coming upon him. Would not have believed it if he had been told. He knew that they were bad days for him. They were days in which he sat pounding out useless hours at the typewriter, only to destroy the work as soon as he had done it. They were nights when he worked feverishly, bitterly at the jokes and skits that were at once his bread and butter and the bane of his soul.

He came to hate the mere thought of writing at all. He was a failure. Even the things that he could do, the hated jokes that until now had brought him enough for a living, were now failing him. He was not making enough to afford to take Augusta and her mother away from this big house. And the thought that Augusta in the face of all her burdens was obliged to keep it to support her mother and herself, while he barely paid his board drove him frantic.

One day in the middle of the winter he climbed to the coop in the fourth story of the old building in Bleeker street where the presses were complaining over the last edition of the afternoon. He had been walking

nearly all day, climbing stairs in increasing discouragement and going down them again with a certain sickly relief. He was, in short, looking for work.

Six months before he would have sworn that he would never again have to go back to the treadmill of routine work. He had been so sure that he could sit his whole life, if necessary, and turn out stories and scraps enough to give him the money he needed. He had deliberately planned for himself a life in which he would earn just enough to live in his own way, giving himself the time to think and work upon the books that he wanted to write.

His marriage had changed his plan of life. He did not propose that Augusta and her mother should be dependent upon the girl's work and the house. It did not occur to him that Augusta was not, and did not intend to be, dependent upon him for a living. There was, of course, a living in the house for herself and her mother, as there had always been. But that was not Wardwell's way of looking at the matter. Augusta was his wife. And it was his immediate business to begin earning enough money for all three of them.

At once he had begun to crowd himself. For a few weeks he had found himself earning more money than he had ever thought possible from his daily work. But it took him only a short time to flood the market of Sunday papers which he had built up for himself. He had not known how thin was the vein which he had been working. In a certain foolish contempt for the thing which he did easily he had thought that he could turn it out mechanically, without heart in it, and in any quantity. He was sharply undeceived.

The first few batches of stories that came back did no more than annoy him. But as the refusals became more and more perfunctory, and more carefully polite, Wardwell knew, with sickening insight, that his stories

were not even being read by the editors who used to welcome them.

He knew that he had lost his power through despising it. He had writhed on in ugly despair, cursing the facility with which he could still write; for he knew that it was that very facility which was now his undoing. He had not hoped, but he had kept on trying. Now his money was gone and he must find something.

Jim Ray was sympathetic, and heartily sceptical.

"All rot!" he growled. "Stop biting your finger ends and ease up a little. Your face looks like a rat's with the ferret about three jumps behind. Quit it. Borrow some money. Here, I'm as poor as my own devil but I can get you some. There's lots of the stuff around somewhere. Borrow a hundred and go up on a farm somewhere for a few weeks, and sleep."

"You're all wrong," said Wardwell, still breathing hard, "there's nothing the matter with me. It's the confounded stairs here. They're so steep they lean over backward."

"You need to go easy, I tell you, Jimmie. What you need is a rest."

"Rest! I haven't done a stroke for six weeks!"

"Probably not. But you've been bending over a typewriter till the back ribs are sticking into your lungs."

"What in blazes are you talking about?" said Wardwell bluffly. "If you want to stall me off, why don't you give me the usual thing—'office all full just now, leave your name and address, we'll call you up if we need, and so forth?' Was I so useless as that when I was here?"

"Jimmie," said Ray quietly, "there's plenty of work here for a man as good as you. But you're not able just now to do it, and it would kill you to try. Go home and go to bed, and let your wife take care of you."

Wardwell stared at his friend, trying to outface him, to bluff the thing down by sheer stubbornness. But there was a sickening, cold weakness at the bottom of his stomach. He knew that Ray was seeing through him and finding him out as he had not been able to see himself.

With an odd feeling of curiosity and detachment he walked over to a little square of mirror that hung on a pillar at just the right height for Ray to comb his bald head by. Wardwell took it off the nail and shoved it up the post about a foot and a half.

He was curious to know what it was in him that Ray had seen. But there was nothing to be seen, except, perhaps, a sort of hunted look about the eyes and a kind of pinched drawing of the nostrils. He did not look at all like a sick man.

"You're all wrong," he repeated stubbornly. "And besides, my wife's got something else to do."

Ray only answered quietly:

"How much are you coughing, Jimmie?"

Wardwell looked around sharply, in a turn of sudden worry. But in a moment he laughed out:

"What the deuce are you doing? Second story work, along with your other little activities? Of course I—I cough a little. But that's just the smoking and the irritation. Confound you, you'd be coughing bricks if you'd been sitting at a machine for six weeks without being able to knock out a good line!"

"I suppose so. But, Jimmie, you'll have to give up this other idea. You don't look well. You'd never stand cold and wet and long waiting. You know the dog's life of a reporter. One good cold would do for you."

"But, I tell you—"

"Jimmie, be sensible for once. Go home and let that good little girl of yours get a good look at you. If she doesn't tell you to pack off out of the city for a while, I'll admit that I'm wrong."

Wardwell stayed a while, arguing mulishly, but Jim Ray did not move from his position. He would not agree to help Jimmie to a job because the latter was not able to work.

At home, he found Augusta tearfully trying to coax and lift her mother back into bed. As he stood in the sitting room he could hear the girl pleading:

"Please, please, mamma dear, can't you help just one little step! I can't lift any more—Just one little step!"

Then he heard the sagging of the bed under the heavy body and he knew that Augusta had accomplished her task.

Now he remembered what Doctor Gardner had told him, that this phase of Mrs. Wilding's malady would come—not long before the end. She would rouse herself out of the torpor into which she had settled. Some vague, unformed fear would probably stir her, and she would have to be watched. If it was coming now Augusta must not be left to do this alone. He would have to find a good strong nurse. He must see Gardner about it right away. That he had no money did not occur to him now. In the face of Augusta's need he did not think of that fact.

Augusta came out suddenly and walked straight into Jimmie's arms where he stood in the middle of the room.

"Oh, Jimmie," she said, resting tiredly against him, "I needed you so! Where have you been?"

"Oh, just around."

"She had crawled under the bed, Jimmie," said Augusta choking, "just like some poor wild thing, and when she looked out at me, *Oh!* Why, why does she seem to fear me, to almost *hate* me sometimes?"

"No, dearest, no," said Jimmie, holding her quiet. "No, it isn't that at all. There's something we don't

understand. She's in the dark and so are we. Her mind is struggling to break through, and we cannot help because we are in the dark too. Outwardly she doesn't know you. But she does know you, dear, she feels you, in another way. She knows that her little Augusta is around her, caring for her. The flesh and the senses are playing a cruel trick on her poor spirit, dear. But she does know that you are about her."

"Oh, Jimmie, do you really believe it? I'm so tired trying to believe!"

"Yes, dear, I'm as sure as that we are standing here that she does in some way—I don't know how—she does really feel you. But I'm afraid, dearest that there is a change coming now. You know Gardner told us to expect it. And it's going to be cruel hard upon you, dear. You must not try to do all alone. I'll see Gardner tonight and we'll get a good strong nurse."

At the word he felt Augusta stiffen resistingly in his arms and he knew that a struggle was coming.

"Oh, Jimmie, don't ask me to do that! I couldn't—I couldn't give up one little bit of her, not one little minute to anyone."

"But, dear, you are not able. You are too little for it."

"I can't help it, Jimmie. You know I can't. You know how I've waited, every hour of every day, waited and prayed, for a moment when my darling would know me—when she would know that I hadn't left her, that she hadn't been left to strange, careless people. And think, Jimmie, think what it would mean to me if the moment came, even one little flash, and I wasn't there for her to know me! Jimmie," she said quietly, turning slowly upon him with that strange, unseeing light in her eyes, "I think, if my moment should slip away from me that way—I think that I should die."

And Wardwell, bewildered, silenced, half believing, knew that he was beaten.

But he did go to see the doctor.

Doctor Gardner's little eyes twinkled behind a cloud of smoke from a big cigar as Wardwell expounded the situation at home and told what must be done and what Augusta must not be allowed to do. When Jimmie had quite finished the doctor asked with an elaborate diffidence:

"Ah—Do I understand that you are intending to do something that Augusta does not want?"

"Well—of course—" Jimmie started to explain.

"I was only going to remark," the doctor went on serenely, "that, to my personal knowledge, Augusta began doing things after her own plan on the day she was born. And, so far as I know, nobody has been able to change that. You see, the trouble has been that she has always turned out to be right."

"Yes, of course she's always right," Wardwell hastened to agree, "but, in this—"

"And, unless you have found a way," the doctor proceeded, "of changing Augusta, we'll just have to let her go her own way in this. To be sure, though, we must try to see that she does not kill herself with the hard work."

"But how's the book coming on?" he asked suddenly, sitting up and fixing Wardwell with a sharp, steady appraisal that Jimmie could almost feel physically.

"Rotten!" said Jimmie, annoyed and sullen, though he did not know why. "But how did you know—?"

"Oh, Augusta was telling me something the other day, about your walking the floor, and—one thing and another. Come inside here a moment," the doctor commanded, rising brusquely and walking to the door of his inner office.

As Wardwell closed the double baize-lined, sound-

proof doors of the little consulting room behind him he felt a sickening assurance that he was going to hear bad news. But he was mainly irritated and angry with himself because he now knew that he had been giving Augusta additional worry.

A half hour later he was listening restlessly to Doctor Gardner's explanations about 'filtration in the upper right lobe' and 'weakening of the walls' and gathering in a general way that he was well on the way to being a consumptive. He was telling himself quietly that he did not believe a word of it, that if he could just once strike his stride on a good little story he would be all right in a week.

Finally the doctor prescribed. "You will have to get out of the city at once. Just walk out, don't fuss about it, and go south somewhere, where you can stay out in the open and just lie around and eat and sleep. Don't take work with you, and don't let it follow you. Just walk out and drop everything but the business of saving your life. That's just what I mean, young man. I have not concealed anything from you. And—I'm not exaggerating anything. You must do this *now*, tomorrow."

Saying nothing, Wardwell rose to go. Inwardly he was grumbling to himself that it was always easy for the other fellow to tell you to drop everything and walk away. But he knew that he could not be churlish. The doctor was probably right and certainly he was honest and friendly. They shook hands in silence, and the doctor, used to seeing people take their news in all sorts of ways, let him go without another word.

Augusta had once said that Jimmie sometimes was not quite grown up. Outside in the street he proved it. He turned deliberately and looking up at Doctor Gardner's window, much after the manner of a boy sticking out his tongue in defiance, he said aloud:

"You can go to the devil. I wouldn't leave Augusta now, not to save ten lives."

As an afterthought, before reaching home, he went into a drug store and called the doctor on the telephone. He warned him truculently:

"Tell her my nerves are bad, that's true enough. Tell her any tale you like. But don't tell her—what you've just told me. I won't have Augusta worried now."

He would not expect to hide it long from Augusta, if there was anything seriously wrong with him. She always knew the truth, somehow. But he did not believe literally what the doctor had told him, and he was confident that things could drift on as they were.

"In fact," he said to himself as he walked along in the face of the sharp night wind, "I feel better this minute than I have for a long time. That's just natural contrariness, I suppose."

Augusta was waiting for him, sitting wrapped in a heavy dressing robe reading under the lamp in her mother's sitting room. She was so like a tired little girl that as his glance momentarily followed the stream of the light into the mother's room and fell upon the little cot drawn up and ready at the side of the mother's bed, Wardwell for an instant lost his grip on reality. The fiction at which Rose Wilding's poor wandering mind had grasped seemed to be actually the truth. And Wardwell found that he had to struggle with himself before he could remember that Augusta was truly his wife and that she and he had an existence for each other which did not depend on that fiction. But when he looked again at Augusta and saw the woman in her, the steady, self-contained, gentle strength that shone in the beauty of her tired eyes, he knew that Augusta was really his. And now for the first time he weakened, his knees bent under him, he felt and was the sick man. He wanted to tell her, to confide, to lean upon her.

Angrily he shook the feeling off and came quickly over to sit on the arm of her chair.

"You had him all fixed!" he began accusingly, thinking to head off with banter the question in her eyes. "The first thing he said was that you got up and rearranged the parlor furniture and fired the cook and fixed the furnace the very day you were born—well, I couldn't swear that he mentioned the furnace in so many words. But that was the general idea. You've always had your own way, and everybody else's way. And you always will. And he turned me out, laughing at me for thinking that I could change things."

"What else did he say, dear?" she asked with a quiet smile of full understanding. "About you?"

"Oh, it was just like the fellow that went to the doctor and said he was sick.

"Stop smoking."

"But, doctor, I never smoked in my life."

"Oh, I see. Then that's just what you need. Start smoking. My usual fee is ten dollars—but—ah—considering—"

"*Jimmie!*"

"Honest! 'Cross my heart! Hope to die of a broken leg! It was just like that.

"He told me that I had to take a rest. I told him I hadn't worked for weeks. Then he told me that whatever I was doing I should stop it."

"You are not telling me what he really said," Augusta commented.

"Oh, big words, all big long ones, that might have meant polygamy or liver trouble for all I knew. But the upshot of it was just what I knew before. I'm nervous and my temper is bad. And he must have known that I didn't have any money, for he really didn't ask me for any," he confessed gracelessly as an after-thought.

"But it's just as I told him. If I could only rap out a decent few lines I'd be all—"

A sharp fit of coughing came up, choking him. He rose and hurried out into the hall. Augusta started to follow him, but a movement in the bedroom caught her ear and she turned back. She wanted to follow him, to make him tell her just what was the trouble. But the fear of what her mother might do was too strong upon her.

For the time, Wardwell had escaped. In his own room, he sat down at the desk, gasping between spells of coughing and trying to smother the noise with his handkerchief. The coughing stopped after a little, and he was surprised to feel a sensation of pleasant warm moisture in his irritated throat.

He cocked one ear up in a funny way he had, as though to listen. Then put his handkerchief to his lips and held it there a moment. When he drawn it away and looked meditatively for a little while at the red blotch on it, he nodded his head.

He did not take this fresh piece of news argumentatively, defiantly, as he had met the words of the doctor. This was definite, conclusive. He must deliberate. He decided that he would deliberate. That was the thing. This matter must be thought out carefully.

He looked at the typewriter in front of him, for counsel. Then suddenly his arms shot out grabbing the rusted iron frame of the typewriter and hugging it, while his head sank down upon it and he whispered to it in agony:

"God! Never another good line on you!"

This has to be told. In that moment, that battered old contraption of cast iron and rattling keys was more to Jimmie Wardwell than woman, man or child could be. It was dearer to him, it was nearer to where he thought and really lived. And he loved it and hugged it

to him, as though already they were trying to take part of his soul from him. For men of Wardwell's kind are like that. When the passion of creating has once gotten fire in their souls, they are damned to live this life alone. No articulate being can come near. And in their loneliness they fasten on something connected with their passion. There have been men who have loved to the death a rickety old table at which they have worked, or even a corner of a garret room.

After a while Jimmie lurched up out of his chair and fumblingly got ready to crawl into bed. It was the first time that he had missed going down to say good-night, but he dared not face Augusta tonight.

The idea of dying, physically, meant little or nothing to him. He had never thought of it. He did not think of it now. But the failures of the past months and this last sure sign of physical failure, of the end in fact, threw him into blind panic; not a panic in fear of pain, or darkness, still less of punishment. No, it was the fear that the spirit fire, burning pent up and mad within him, was to be smothered. He was afraid, afraid that he, Jimmie Wardwell, would be snuffed out before he could form and bring out the things that burned within him and craved for expression.

Shivering under the bed clothes, he moaned over and over like a hurt child: "Never another good line!" Until, again like a child in pain, he fell into a sort of sleep.

He did not hear, probably he had forgotten, the girl who came with trembling steps and beating heart to listen at his door for this breathing and then hurried back in anxious fear to her own endless vigil.

A Wardwell debonair and blithe as the early spring morning came into Augusta's sitting room after breakfast. He had swept from him all traces of the storm of the night, and Augusta knew from the first glance that she would learn nothing from him in this mood.

"The glory of the morning,
"The beauty of the dawning,
"The joy of the skies,
"Lies in her eyes—and lies—and lies—and—Oh,
"Well, maybe it only fibs,"
He chanted impudently.

Augusta was standing at the table fixing fruit for her mother. As Jimmie came up behind her she lifted up her face to be kissed. But as Jimmie stooped she quickly lifted the peeled peach she held in her hand and stuck it full into his mouth.

"Aawa—yab yab—yak!" Jimmie expostulated. Then, when he was articulate:

"Peaches is peaches, I'll admit. But some peaches is witches, you'll admit. Anyhow, I *won't* be kissed now till I've had a bath," he wound up defiantly.

"Come in to see mother," said Augusta serenely.

Rose Wilding lay propped among the snowy pillows and took no notice whatever of them as they came in. Her rounded face and beautiful, long, capable hands were as white as were the masses of lovely white hair that flowed down past her temples. Only her great dark blue eyes showed a bit of color. They looked straight ahead, alive, and full of knowledge, but a knowledge that seemed to have nothing to do with this present business of living. Wardwell was struck this morning more than ever by the look of complete detachment and absorption in the eyes. He had never thought much of souls as apart from bodies. But with the writing man's unconscious trick of always trying to put even the vaguest, most fugitive thoughts into words, he found himself trying to word the nameless idea. Here was a soul, he thought, living quite detached and almost independent in a beautiful and almost useless body. And he saw no reason at all why this soul, so independent, so complete to itself, could not at will

leave the unnecessary body and go on about its own absorbing business.

Meanwhile he was urging:

"She made me eat half of your fruit already, Mrs. Wilding, and if you don't hurry and eat the other half, why, she'll make me eat it all, just to save it."

"Yes, eat up good, darling," Augusta urged gently, with the way that was now growing upon her of petting a child. "And don't mind him. You know I wouldn't give him even a little tiny bit of your fruit."

"Oh, good morning, Mister Jimmie," said Rose Wilding, in the quick apologetic way of one who has momentarily forgotten a politeness. "I hope the book is coming on well."

She had not spoken before for weeks. Wardwell was startled completely off his guard and the sudden mention of the book caught him on the raw and brought back the hideous, shamed cowardice of the night.

Augusta, looking quickly up at him in her own surprise, saw the agony and bitterness in his face, and wondered. Jimmie was never bitter. Then she saw his face clear, and she knew that whatever it was he had fought it down.

"Fine and dandy," he lied glibly, "only"—he paused a moment with one ear turned up whimsically, as though considering how best to place the difficulty before her—"only there's a Scotchman in it and he's the contrariest man I ever had to deal with. He's Scotch and he insists on talking a great deal, which is all wrong for a Scotchman. But, what's worse, he will talk with a North of Ireland accent. You see, the two brogues are so much alike, and I can't get him to stick to his own."

Rose Wilding reached daintily for a quarter of a peach and commented helpfully:

"I mind I knew an Eyetalian once that talked with

the softest Kerry brogue you ever heard. I guess they caught him young somewhere."

Wardwell shouted uproariously, and Augusta laughed out in quick surprised happiness. Never since the very first had her mother spoken so naturally and like her dear self of other days.

While Augusta turned away a moment, Wardwell was watching her mother. She was smiling with the contagion of their laughter, but she had her eye fixed calculatingly upon Augusta. When she seemed to be convinced that it was safe, that Augusta would not turn immediately to see her, she reached out hastily and snatching a banana from the tray hid it under a pillow beside her. Then she looked up furtively, to see if Wardwell had seen her.

He winked and smiled at her, as one who compounds the felony of a friend and brother. She laughed a little confused, deprecating laugh, like a child caught in some new delinquency. Augusta looked around, glancing from her mother to Wardwell, but she saw nothing. And Jimmie never told her. He understood. Rose Wilding had always had a good appetite. And she loved fruit. She had spent some time in that place on the Island, where it was said that the attendants took all of the best that was intended for the patients. Hunger, or at least the fear of hunger had taught her to do that.

When he looked again he saw that the curtain had fallen. It was as though the spirit of Rose Wilding which for a few minutes had stirred the body and the senses to life had now gone. Only the eyes remained alive, looking, looking not at Wardwell, not at the wall, but at some problem, some question of another existence.

Augusta, understanding instantly, did not try to arouse her mother again. Resignedly, she took up the tray and went silently from the room. And Wardwell followed without a word.

Not again, until the very last, did Rose Wilding open her lips to speak.

Day by day her response to the promptings of life grew less and less. With what seemed a deliberate purpose her spirit refused to know anything of what went on about her. It was as though she definitely turned her back upon life. She did not suffer. She had left all that behind and was going her own way, unmolested by the useless body.

To Wardwell the sight of the helpless, almost deserted body was sometimes uncanny. To Augusta, however, living as she did and had always done so close to the soul of her mother, these things did not greatly matter. That her mother did not speak to her, did not even look at her, was not now so hard to bear. Though she loved the big beautiful, baby-like body and petted it as she would have fondled a baby, yet she was able to realize that she must soon give it up. So that, by degrees and without consciousness of it, she dropped the mediums of the senses and found herself slipping easily and naturally over into that strange border land where her mother lived.

Wardwell was not fighting any longer. He had accepted what he thought was fate. He did not argue. He did not look farther for work.

"I shall now," he said, sitting down deliberately at his machine, "'proceed,' as they say aboard-ship—I wonder why does a navy man always say he 'proceeded' to the deck and 'proceeded' to the bottom of the ammunition well? He just ran out on deck, and he probably fell down the stairs in the other case, but he 'proceeded'—I shall, therefore, proceed to write jokes till I choke.

"The suffering public? Well, the public always suffers. What do I care for them, or it, or him—whichever it is. Must be him, I guess. The women only read

the corn cure ads and the hair tonic miracles with which the advertising editor garnishes the funny page. Hang it! I never appreciated that fellow. I thought he was a low commercial boulder on that page. Nothing of the kind. He belongs there. His ads are just as old and reliable and well thumbed as any of the other jokes."

With a grin on his face he went to work, humming:

"Rip Van Winkle was a piker,

"There are some folks sleeping yet."

And because he had put off the worry that had been harping at him he found the work coming true and easy. He forgot the book and his big dreams, half way happy if he could earn enough to prevent his being an added burden to Augusta. And because he now did not greatly care, because he left the whole business on the knees of whatever gods had cared to meddle with his affairs, the work began to pay well.

Three separate eddies of life moved quietly about their round in the house. Ann the cook had taken the reins of authority from Augusta's hands and was now ruling the boarding house with a competent and jealous care. The boarders did not like her, but they knew that she was honest and remorselessly fair and that there was no appeal from her judgments. There were no complaints and the outward business of the house went on smoothly and decorously as always. In the two rooms that were now the world of Augusta and her mother everything circled about the dim little pale flame of life in her mother which Augusta was feeding with her love. And in his own room Wardwell worked craftily on, going softly, husbanding his strength from day to day, paying it out painfully, like a miser bit by bit, at the machine, making every bit count for some work done, and jealously guarding his growing weakness from Augusta's eyes. She must know before very long, he realized. But, well, who could tell what might happen?

And in the meantime there was a little work to be done each day. Each line of it would be a help to her in the end.

So the three eddies of life went quietly around, touching each other and lapping a little upon each other, but each one a world by itself. Spring came and slipped well along into May, the street cries changed, the glistening pavements began to throw the heat back up into the house, and the threat of a blistering summer came upon the air. The three little worlds in the house went on so quietly, so unobtrusively, that it seemed that they might have been forgotten, that they might go on indefinitely, that they had been left out of any scheme of change.

But the change came, swift and disturbing as though it had never been expected.

Wardwell heard the cry come up in the still night from the room below him. He had been sitting in the dark, thinking of nothing, his mind at loose ends, but he knew Augusta's cry and recognized in it the trembling, very human fear of death.

As he came to the door of Rose Wilding's room he saw Augusta half kneeling on the bed holding fast to her mother's hands. To Wardwell it seemed that Rose Wilding was making a quivering, feeble struggle to rise. But Augusta evidently knew different. She was pleading in a desperate, pitiful whisper:

"Don't go! Please, darling mamma, don't go till you've known me, just for one little minute! I won't try to keep you, darling, I know you want to go. But just look at me once, so that I can see that you know your own Augusta, please darling."

The hands that Augusta held stopped their quivering struggle and Rose Wilding lay quiet, as though listening. Then slowly, naturally, she opened her eyes with the sweet clear light of perfect reason shining

gently in them. And she said in a tender, confiding whisper:

"Augusta, my own. Stay close to me. It's—it's lonely—going." With a sigh as of a tired child she closed her eyes and seemed to try to cuddle to the warmth of the young body that was close to her. Then she lay quite still.

After a little Wardwell gently lifted Augusta away. She did not resist, nor did she break out weeping as he had been almost hoping that she would do. Instead, she leaned against him, begging for full assurance:

"She *did* know me, didn't she, Jimmie!"

"Of course, dear, of course she did."

Then Augusta went slowly over to the little cot which had been her partner in the play of the weary pitiful months and began folding it away.

Through the two days that followed Wardwell did all the necessary things with a calculated care that showed how well he had schooled himself. He saw to everything, anticipated everything, exerting himself more than he had done for weeks, yet always carefully holding himself within the limits of his strength lest a sudden breakdown should come to frighten Augusta.

It was only on the lonely ride back from the cemetery, through the sand pitted lots and broken streets of Greenpoint and across the ferry, that Jimmie began to go to pieces. He was tired, tired of the struggle to keep up, tired of the silly pretense of being a normal, cheery, good hearted fellow. Besides, Augusta did not seem to have needed him. She had not broken down. She would, he thought, have done just as well without him. And he began to pity himself inordinately.

Now he was sure that Augusta was looking at him in a thoughtful, speculative sort of way. Although he knew well enough that Augusta was not aware of his condition, yet it took only a few minutes of this bent of

thought to convince him fully that she was wondering what in the world she could do with a hopelessly sick husband on her hands.

The foolish, overweening egotism of a sick mind in a sick body took sway over him, making him forget everything but his own morbid line of thoughts. Augusta did not need him. He was of no use to her, or to anybody. He never would, in fact, be of any use. It would be better to let it end now. He had never really been Augusta's husband. He had served her as well as he could. But that was over now. She did not need him now. He pressed his self inflicted hurt home and took a sort of miserable pleasure from the pain. She at least could be happy. Why should he drag her down the long dark path with himself. He might live on and on for a deuce of a while—people did, you know. No, he was not going to let the poor girl in for anything like that.

The heady, self-centred resolution took shape rapidly, and he began to fill it in with all sorts of reasonable and thoughtful advantages.

He would drop out now, today, while things were still in their present state. If he waited at all, Augusta would at once find out his condition and she would—he knew her—immediately break up her house and pack off with him to wherever the doctors told her to take him. And he would be unable to resist once she took hold. Then, in the inevitable end, she would have spent on him whatever money she had—he had never thought to wonder whether it was much or little, or any—her home and her way of living would be gone. He would be gone. And she would be alone, among strangers, with no way of making a living, probably broken down from nursing him—He drew the whole picture and elaborated upon it.

Yes he must drop out today, quietly, without a word, and just drift—drift on over towards oblivion. Augusta

would miss him, but she would not really need him. It would be all very simple. A short time, maybe only a few days, of knocking around and he would be completely down sick. Then some hospital or other would pick him up, under any name he happened to be able to think of, and—and everything would settle itself without fuss. He particularly did not want any fuss. He was tired and he had found a way to avoid all bother.

He turned smiling cheerily to Augusta. He found her looking at him, studying him with a grave, and, somehow, a different, interest.

Augusta had found herself face to face with a problem of her own.

She had known for a long time that there was something pressing on Jimmie's mind. She knew, of course, that he was not altogether well. But, with her own wonderful health and soundness, she could not think of mere illness as the cause of his trouble. She was sure that the trouble was in his heart. He had not been the same since they had known definitely that her mother must so go.

Was that his trouble? He was, in a way, free now.

He had been kind and dear. He had done all that she had asked him—Yes, she remembered now with confusion, she had literally *asked* him. And he had done everything that she had needed and more than he had promised.

Did he want to go now?

If he did, she must make him go. For she knew well enough, she thought, that Jimmie would never let her know that he wanted to go. He would just stay on and be kind and say nothing. But she must not let him do that.

Yet, with all her reasoning and searching, Augusta was first a woman. There was just one question, and she knew it. With the simple, terrible directness of a child she put it to herself.

Did he love her? She had never known, really. He was so kind, and so good an actor.

They were alone now, for the first time. There was now no one, nothing that they had to think of but themselves.

Fearless and direct as she was, Augusta quivered with the dread of parting, for she had come to love the very thought of Jimmie's nearness. But she knew that they were now facing the elementary facts of life. Childlike, she had not anticipated this hour. She saw now with a startling and vivid reality that, for the sake of both their lives, she must *know*, before another day, whether Jimmie loved her as a man must love a woman.

A forgotten and unbidden memory came to her in that instant, and although she did not imagine that it had any bearing upon her problem she grasped it and brought it out into the light, never thinking where the consequences might lead.

"Jimmie," she said, turning quickly, "maybe you won't remember, but one day last September I saw you in the Square talking to a lady. She had been driving along in an automobile, and she saw you and called to you. Then she drove the machine up to the curb and stopped, and you came and stood with your foot on the running board. While you talked she seemed to be pleading with you about something. Who was she?"

"Ah-ha!" said Jimmie gaily. "At last! I am now an accredited and confirmed husband. My wife has begun to delve into my dark past. I am now a married man! Listen, my dear, and I will unfold unto thee a tale:

"That lady—and she was a tall dark lady, mind you—was actually trying to pay me back borrowed money! Did you ever hear the like?"

"She'd borrowed money from *you*?" said Augusta, with thoughtless emphasis.

"Does sound like a joke, doesn't it," Jimmie admitted, with just a tinge of bitterness in his voice. Augusta had unwittingly touched the sore spot which he himself had just been prodding. "But—"

"Oh, I didn't mean that! Please forgive me, Jimmie, I didn't mean it that way at all!"

"It's all right," said Jimmie lightly. "I can explain. There had been a time when she was not as prosperous as she appeared that day. And there also had been times—short and fleeting as they were—times when I had plenty of money. Therefore." He turned his hands out before him in a sort of Latin way, as though nothing could be plainer.

Augusta sat back, saying nothing. She was sorry that she had spoken now, and about this. Jimmie, she felt, had told the literal truth. And the incident seemed to make it more difficult to lead up to the things which she must say today.

They rode to the door in silence, both subdued by the nearness of a crisis which each foresaw in a different way. As the lugubrious coach drove away they stood on the sidewalk looking after it, both half conscious that it was the last vestige of an existence with which they were now finished. When it had trundled around the nearest corner and disappeared they turned to each other and, instinctively, like two solemn, slightly frightened children, took hands and went stealing up the steps.

Augusta did not miss Wardwell until evening. When he did not appear for supper, she ran up the stairs to bring him, thinking that he had perhaps fallen asleep. She had been busying herself through the afternoon, putting off the inevitable. And now she decided that it could be put off for still a little longer. She need not speak just yet.

His door stood open, but Jimmie was not there. She

wondered that he should have gone out today, for she knew he was tired. But, maybe, he had just gone down to the street, and perhaps he would be coming in any minute. She lingered a little, looking around at the signs of Jimmie's ways—a pair of shoes in the middle of the floor, a coat draped perilously from the arm of a chair, a necktie festooning a doorknob, for Jimmie, while he was always wholesomely clean, was certainly not orderly. And then the loose, scrambled piles of papers all over his desk. She had often wanted to fuss among them, to straighten them out and make neat piles of them. But she had learned that this was one of the points on which Jimmie would fight. Anyone might hide his shoes away or hang up his coat or take his neckties away to press, but touch that desk and he would roar. And she had always understood and loved the little boyish jealousy with which he guarded everything he wrote until it was printed.

She went over on tiptoe, to take just a peep at what was on the typewriter.

As if he had known that she would do just this, the words flashed cruelly up at her from the middle of the white paper:

"I am going away, on urgent business—I am very tired."

Augusta sank down into the chair, covering the words with her arm, sobbing:

"Oh, Jimmie, Jimmie, did you have to hurt me this way! I wouldn't have tried to hold you. I would have let you go, and blessed you for the dear good boy you've been to me. I know you were tired. But you didn't need to hurt me!"

After a little she sat up and forced herself to look at the line of words as they stared up at her. And as she studied them she found herself listening for the sound of Jimmie's voice saying them. Then she knew why

Jimmie had written the words instead of saying them to her.

She would not have believed him. And Jimmie had known that.

Word by word and tone by tone, she made him say it over to her mind's ear and eye, even to the little lift in his shoulder with which he would have ended—And she knew!

Jimmie did not mean that at all. He did not want to go away from her!

"Urgent business!" Love laughed up in her heart. Jimmie and urgent business!

And then the quiet, thinking Augusta came back. This was no caprice, no mere whim of Jimmie's. He had tried to make her believe that he was tired and only wanted escape. He had deliberately tried to hurt her so that she would believe. Jimmie would not have done that without a powerful reason.

And he was gone. Nothing could be more definite than that. If she had seen him packing trunks for a week his going could not have been so convincing. He had simply changed into his everyday street suit and walked out, humming:

"The Priest of the Parish,

"The Clerk and his man

"Went 'round the church yard

"With a red hot brick in his han'."

Augusta rose and stole to the door to peer down the stairs, half frightened by the distinctness of her image of him. The impression that she had gotten, of Jimmie walking down the stairs, hands in pockets, humming that tuneless old rhyme of his, had been so vivid that for the moment she had thought it real, had believed that she was hearing and seeing Jimmie go down the stairs.

The blank unconcern of the stairway looking back at her chilled her. Jimmie was gone.

A sudden feeling of physical weakness that came over her now brought up to her one thing that she had overlooked. She remembered that she had never really found out what Dr. Gardner had said to Jimmie that night when he had gone to see him. Jimmie had baffled her with many words, both wise and foolish. And the doctor had not told her anything definite. They had both treated her as they would have answered a child. But that was different, then she had been living only for her mother.

Now the conviction came to her that the key to Jimmie's action was to be found in his talk that evening with the doctor. He had never really been the same since. So it was a quiet, determined Augusta who faced the doctor that evening.

"I told him that he was in very bad shape and that he would be worse if he didn't get out of the city at once. That was some weeks ago. But I imagine he went away laughing at me a little. He seemed to have some absurd notion that you needed him, that he was helping you by staying." Doctor Gardner wasted no words, for he did not feel that he was any longer bound by the promise of silence that he had made to Wardwell.

"I needed him every moment," said Augusta slowly; "and he stayed until he had done everything."

"Stayed? Has he gone now?"

"No no," said Augusta quickly. "I was just thinking—That was all." Suddenly it seemed to her that she must not on any account admit that Jimmie had gone away. She must find him now, tonight. She must not let it become established that he had gone at all.

"Of course, you should have let me know," she went on hurriedly. "But then, I know Jimmie. He just talked you into keeping it from me. He can talk anybody into anything if he sets his mind to it. Now I must get home right away."

She was already on her way to the door, and the doctor, although he had helpful advice ready to offer her, did not try to detain her. He saw that, just now, she wanted nothing but to get away. So he followed her resignedly to the street door, only saying:

"You know that if you need me in any way—"

From the steps she turned and, not trusting herself to speak, grasped his hand impulsively. Then she was gone.

As he stood looking down into the dusk after her, he wondered why she turned west, away from her home. He cleared his throat, to call after her.

But, well, she had always done things herself, in her own way. And she was always right.

Augusta did not know that Wardwell a few hours earlier had sauntered just this way that she was hurrying. She did not know as she crossed West street, now silent and deserted as a country road, that Jimmie had walked recklessly through its roaring traffic, weakly half hoping that something would happen to him. She did not know that he had stood just where she came to stand, looking down over the railing into the slip between two docks, asking questions of the lapping water.

A dock watchman who stood within a few feet of her put his lantern out of his hand, merely as a precaution. She did not look like any of the many kinds that he had seen coming to look too curiously at the water. But, she was in trouble. Happy people do not come peering down into rivers. He cautiously moved a little closer to her.

Then she turned and, without so much as a look back, crossed the street again and turned north.

"Whatever she was lookin' for," the watchman grumbled, "it wasn't here."

Augusta was not thinking or reasoning, or consciously searching for Jimmie. She had loosened her mind, as it were, and was letting herself drift in his wake. She

understood him now. She knew now what he had been going through. She was following every thought of his as it had worked through his brain and had turned out into action. She was feeling with him and suffering the hurt that he had felt. But she was not following him now because she pitied him. It was not because she wished to care for him, to mother him, to make good her debt to him.

She was following him now because she loved him. Up to now she had needed him, his protection, his kindness, his dear thoughtfulness and his cheer. Now she needed him because she had found out, in this last half hour, that she loved him with a desperation that would have frightened her if she had been able to think of it. She did not care whether he was sick or well. She did not care whether he wanted to stay or go. She would find him. She would hold him. She would not stop walking until she had found him. And then she would put her arms around him. And not any other woman, nor even death itself would get him from her.

Now she knew that she was on the right way. Her start towards the river had been a false one, just as Jimmie's had been. Jimmie had had no more real thought of harming himself than she had had of finding the end of her search in the river.

He had just set himself adrift aimlessly, and unconsciously she seemed to know that mere physical weariness would bring him to where all the drifting logs of the city's stream sooner or later come to rest, the park benches.

Through the endless night she trudged, scanning the thousand figures that weariness and misery and failure take when they finally slump down to the friendly darkness of a shaded bench.

Policemen looked sharply after her. Good men looked wonderingly after her. Bad men looked dis-

criminatingly after her. Her soul was sick with the misery and the sordidness that she searched among. But her heart was not afraid. She was right, and love was at the end of her search.

In the gray, haggard dawn she saw him at a little distance, sitting jauntily erect, his hand extended resting lightly on his cane, peering interestedly up into the coming light of the new day—as though he had that moment sat down to enjoy the fresh morning and to wonder at the miracle of dawn.

Augusta trembled in every aching nerve, but her heart laughed as she stole toward him. It was so like him, sitting up making a play at interest, when, as she knew, he probably didn't care whether the day dawned or not.

Then with a little desperate run she was kneeling on the bench beside him and had fairly dragged his head into her arms and was kissing him wildly, passionately.

Now Wardwell said not a word. He did not at first seem surprised. It is doubtful if, knowing Augusta and remembering her actions in those days when her mother had been lost, he really had thought that he could lose himself from her in the way he had taken.

But when he found Augusta's arms tight around him something within him awoke with a start. Augusta had kissed him before this—But—

Jimmie Wardwell knew as little of women's love and the ways of it as most men do. But he suddenly straightened up and deliberately pulled one of Augusta's arms away and caught her little face in his hand and looked boldly, hungrily down into her eyes.

For a little while, unashamed and fearless, her eyes gave him back his answer. Then her lashes dropped in surrender, and Wardwell, as though life and strength had suddenly been poured into him, caught her up bodily to him and hugging her tight started to carry her to the nearest street.

IV

"DONAHUE," said Jimmie earnestly, "you may be frank. We do not invite criticism, but we can stand observation. What, then, after two thoughtful days, is your fairly honest opinion of this—ah—institution, of which you are an ornament?"

"Jimmie, you shall not make fun of Donahue. I know he's not pretty. But his eyes are kind, and he is good. He is not for ornament," Augusta defended.

Jimmie laughed wickedly. "All the homely people I ever knew have had that said about them. They are not pretty, but their eyes are good, and they are useful. And they *do* love to hear it! Yes! The men swear great deep oaths under their breath. And what the women do I was never able even to guess." And he shook his head in utter inability to deal with the matter.

"But, pardon me, you are divinely right—as always—about Donahue. Not only is he useful and good; he is more. He is essential, and virtuous. I would defend his morals in open court. And when I think of his temptations, of the wild free and frisky gypsy life that he has led, and then contemplate the shining nobility of his stern virtues, I am positively ashamed of myself. At such times I even resolve to lead a better life.

"He is a thief, of course," he continued reflectively, "but then, stealing is a gypsy virtue, so—"

"He isn't any such thing," Augusta said, again drawn out to the defense. "I know he ate the bag of apples, bag and all. But he thought they were—"

"Woman, you interrupt. You digress. You trifle. You dissipate and confuse the issue. Let us get on. We

are not discussing Donahue. *He* is considering *us*. Does he approve, or does he merely tolerate? That is the point."

Augusta was at the instant fearfully engaged in the perilous strategy of turning a good sized steak on a very small pan, and was not paying the slightest attention to what he said.

"Again I say, Donahue, let us have your decently reserved opinion. I do not ask for brutal frankness. No rough work, you understand. You have now, for the afore-mentioned two thoughtful days, listened to my uplifting conversation. You have been blessed with the vision of Augusta's beauty. You have eaten her apples. What then? It is time for you to speak."

Thus adjured, Donahue turned his head slightly and sniffed delicately of the mingled tang of Augusta's wood fire and the savor of the cooking steak. His head was close to the ground. He wriggled one ear in a deliberate and patent pretense that a fly was bothering him. Then, as though realizing that that subterfuge would not serve, he calmly and meditatively lifted his off fore leg and deliberately scratched the prominence back of his ear, with the soft side of his hock.

"Aha! A diplomat! Did you see that, Augusta? He has that rarest combination of all—outstanding virtue coupled with tact and good manners. How many very good people are there who could have refrained from giving us their honest opinion? Their duty would have forced them to it. But Donahue, no. He scratches his ear, and refrains. How beautiful it is to be able to refrain!"

"All right, Donahue. All in your own good time. Either you do not care to hurt our feelings, or you are not yet sure that you have made us out. Scratch on, oh gentle minded philosopher, and—"

"Jimmie, get the big plate. You might as well help as sit on that rock and talk. He isn't listening anyway."

Leaving Donahue to his own thoughts, Jimmie went obediently over to the wagon and stepping up on the cross-bar reached a long arm in back of the seat to a swinging rack and deftly brought forth a heavy platter.

"We'll dine out to-night," said Augusta, nodding at the little folding table that she had set out on the grass.

"Oh hear ye, Donahue, our beloved Lady cracketh a pun!"

"Don't jiggle the plate. And *don't drop* it!"

Craftily, his eye on the shifting level of the gravy, his feet feeling for the uneven places of the ground, Jimmie made his perilous journey, with the combined manner of a sleep walker and of a priest of some terrible temple of sacrifice, from the stove to the table.

Then, when Augusta had followed with other things, they sat down on little camp stools close together. A sudden timid, half-fearful reverence and diffidence came over them, as of a perfect moment that could not be held nor ever fully repeated. A fleeting, intangible joy in each other caught them, joy in their very aloneness, in their oneness of thought and heart and soul. And they knew, almost fearfully, that such moments are rare in even the very happiest of all lives. A little tear glistened in the sunlight on Augusta's lashes.

But Jimmie knew better than to let the moment fade out trying to prolong it. Better break it while the beauty of it was yet in the glow.

"I am dying, Egypt, dying, for the half of that steak! Is it any concern of your's, Madam, that your husband has had no food for the last four and twenty hours?"

"You've had six egg's and three quarts of milk, and you fought—"

"Food! I said. Didn't I, Donahue? I repeat, I've had nothing to eat since this time last night. And I am ravening. If you don't cut, I shall tear!"

"Hold the table steady, then."

They ate with happy hunger, laughing at the untried makeshifts with which they tried to bridge over the distance between sacred table manners and the bird-in-hand necessities of the rickety little board, spitting a little now and then as each insisted on giving the other the choicest bits of the food.

Once Jimmie spilled over the salt in a moment of forgetfulness, and he watched curiously as he saw Augusta furtively pick up a tiny pinch of it and pretend to look at it and then, just naturally, throw it over her shoulder. Strangely enough, he had nothing to say on the matter. This little girl woman of his made him think a great deal.

Augusta had brought him home that other morning, out of the park, and sent him to bed. Then she had gone rapidly and ruthlessly to work as though she had been planning just what she was to do.

She saw the boarders of the house at breakfast and told them that she must close the house at once. Some of them had been friends and it pained her to give them any inconvenience. But she told them just why she was forced to do what she was doing. And, before she had finished, there was not one of them who would not have agreed to move his or her trunk out to the sidewalk on the instant, if it would help her.

Then she went to renting agents. And before another day she had sublet the house for the remainder of the term of her mother's lease.

The next part of her work was the worst. She had to bring into the house dirty; pock-marked men whose business it was to paw around with grimy hands and shake the furniture and try to bluff her into discouragement. But she had fixed upon a certain sum of cash money that she must have from the sale of the furniture. And from that determination she was not to be

moved. One after another, Ann joyfully drove these men from the house, and Augusta waited.

The dealers had, of course, run around and seen each other and had agreed among themselves to force her to sell for very little cash. Her husband was sick. She had to go away with him. What could she do? It did not so much matter, they told each other, which of them got the furniture. That could be all fixed up. The thing was to protect the business, so that people shouldn't think that they ought to get new prices in cash for old stuff.

But finally Augusta's steady insistence on one price convinced one dealer that she would never sell for less. He talked with her over the phone. Then he came hurrying to the house, not because he wished to beat his brothers with whom he had agreed, but because he was afraid some one of them would beat him.

He offered Augusta half what she had demanded. Augusta did not argue. She called Ann to do her duty. The wordy battle raged down the stairs and out through the front hall to the door. On the doorstep, with Ann jamming the door on his foot where he had stuck it to prevent her shutting the door, he came to within ten dollars of the sum which Augusta had fixed. With another bang at his foot, Ann relented and let him come back to the foot of the stairs.

Augusta was standing at the head of the stairs. She did not feel any of the zest of battle which inspired Ann. Jimmie was worse that day than she had dreamed of his being. She was keeping him to his room and, as far as possible, hiding from him the things that were taking place in the house. She dreaded now to have him hear any of this argument, and she was sickened with the thought that the ten dollars over which they were haggling might some day be just the price of the difference between life and death for her Jimmie.

Who could tell? The day might come when just for that ten dollars he might be denied the some one thing that would mean life for him. A wild, unknown anger flamed up in her and she took a step down the stairs, threatening in a tense, bitter voice:

"If you do not give me all, I will take everything out into the street and burn it."

The man took one look up into her flaming eyes, and—his hands dropped from the argument which they had been preparing. He turned quickly, grabbed a bill from his pocket and handed it over to Ann, to bind the contract.

Augusta left the two of them to quarrel out the details, for there were some things which she had stipulated that Ann must have. For herself she had reserved only some cooking things and plenty of blankets.

In the meantime she had accomplished the most ambitious part of the whole enterprise. She had bought a horse. She owned Donahue.

Back in her not distant school days Augusta had known Mary Donahue. Old Greenwich village, which nowadays harbors its thousands of intellectual gypsies and free riders of every shade and hobby, used to, and does still, furnish a winter home for a circle—they were not a tribe—of Irish gypsies. They did not form a community, nor did they travel the country in caravans. Each family went out by itself in the spring, through the northern part of the state, sold its own laces, told its own fortunes, swapped its own horses. But by what seemed an unspoken agreement they all returned late in the fall to the same neighborhood. With the instinct for places, which is strong in even the most unreliable of migratory birds, they came to refuge in the rickety jumbles of houses between Washington Square and West Fourteenth street, where one street blunders into another, and gets nowhere, and

turns back, until, in desperation, West Fourth street crosses West Twelfth street and ties the whole business up in a knot.

Patrick Sarsfield Donahue was one of these gypsies, coming honestly and anciently into his way of living and having no intention of leaving it for any other. But Mary Donahue, his daughter, was untrue to the traditions of her kind in that she had insisted on going to school every day of the time they were in New York. Augusta had been interested in her. Augusta *would* be.

Now Augusta went down across Fourteenth street to find Mary Donahue. If Mary Donahue could, and she did, manage, cook for, boss and generally hold together on the road, an enterprise that consisted of a father, six horses—more or less according to the balance of trade, four growing sisters, two wagons, two small healthy brothers, and uncounted, and wholly unaccountable, dogs; if Mary Donahue could manage this, and drive a team of horses, then Augusta could drive one horse and keep Jimmie out in the air and free from worry until he should be cured.

The idea was so simple and so much to her own liking that Augusta was almost ashamed to think of the fun she was going to have with it. And she hugged it jealously to herself so that Jimmie should not know until the wagon was at the door for him.

She knew how he would loathe and fret at the thought of going to any sort of a sanitarium or a resort. And she had a terrible dread that her money would not be enough for that. Now this way, once the horse and wagon were paid for, they would not need any money except for the things they actually ate, they and the horse. She was necessarily a little vague about the latter item. But Mary Donahue could give her the facts as an expert.

Mary Donahue, red haired, quick, a woman where

Augusta was a child, understood and glowed with sympathy. But she could not entirely suppress the little smile of the professional at the ardent amateur. Mentally she gave them about three days to stay out on the road.

But then Augusta talked to her. And Mary Donahue came and saw the business-like way in which Augusta had dismantled the house. And she saw Jimmie. And Augusta talked to her more.

The result was that Patrick Donahue sold Augusta a gypsy horse and a gypsy wagon. And Mary Donahue drove the spectacle to Augusta's door one morning early and announced that she herself would pilot the expedition out of the perils of New York.

She drove the length of Broadway, until that thoroughfare became a country road well beyond the sacred, constable haunted terraces of Yonkers. All the while she discoursed valuable information and wise counsel. Augusta listened greedily, cramming mental notes until her head swam. Wardwell listened too, half asleep, lying most of the day in a bunk that stretched along the side of the wagon, not really believing that this thing was going on as it seemed to be, but not interested enough, and really too sick, to bother about a protest.

Before sun-down Mary Donahue helped them with their first camping and cooking. And Augusta, meekly submitting to the rulings of her mentor, was filled with the secret inner triumph of the dreamer who sees his dream come true under the last common-place test of practicability. She could do it! Her plan would work!

Wardwell, standing around, easing the soreness out of his joints, and sniffing with water in his mouth at the cooking meat—. He had at this time an almost animal craving for red meat, and Augusta's diet would

not allow it until night—Wardwell, too, knew with a sudden conviction that Augusta's plan was going to work.

By the time the busy gypsy girl had shown how to stow the things away for the night she had become so interested in the project that she began to feel a certain responsibility for it.

"What would you do," she asked, eyeing Augusta speculatively as the latter sat on a low stump with a red framing of low sumach bushes hanging about her shoulders, "what could you do if you lost your money on the road, or went broke, or—?"

"Oh, but," Augusta broke in quickly, "Jimmie's going to be all right in no time. And he'll be writing lots and lots. And since it won't cost us hardly anything to live, why we'll be getting rich—rich!"

She did not want the financial outcome of their venture discussed in Jimmie's hearing. She herself had no more thought or fear of the future than have the birds when they start to follow the spring into the north. But she knew that Jimmie's mind was raw on just this, and she wanted it plain that he was the man and the provider.

"Of course," said Mary Donahue, not listening. "But—with eyes like yours"—she was studying Augusta out loud—"and with the look that comes in them at times—why, it'd be a shame not to—" She wheeled quickly and jumped up into the wagon.

She came back with a bundle which she dropped on Augusta's lap. Out of it she shook a long flaming red veil which she wound quickly and bewilderingly around Augusta's head and shoulders.

Wardwell looked on, a benign and philosophical spectator. It seemed that the gypsy girl had packed the wagon. Jimmie was wondering mildly if she had, perhaps, packed in a witch's cauldron, and a package or

two of forked lightning, and a few snail's teeth. If so, he would look forward to an interesting summer.

"Your hair's all wrong for a fortune teller, of course," Mary Donahue admitted. "But that don't make any difference—mine's worse, and I can make as much as the best of them. If it does you no good, it'll do you no harm," she grumbled as she felt Augusta's rising resistance.

"You don't have to keep the money, you know. But always make them pay some money, anyway. Do you hear? Never tell a fortune without money to pay."

She gave Augusta no time to answer but dove at the bundle again, unfolding a red board and breaking out on it a pack of cards.

"You are a 'heart' woman," she said, continuing aloud her study of Augusta. "You are almost too light now, but you'll get darker, and you're married; that makes a difference."

She laid the cards at Augusta's hand, commanding:

"With your left hand, cut three piles towards your heart."

Augusta gingerly lifted the cards as she was told. She was just a little frightened, but she would not protest or let Jimmie see that she felt it to be anything more than a joke.

The gypsy gravely inspected the cards, top and bottom, of the three piles, and said nothing. Then she put them together and began dealing out from top and bottom into eight piles, a single card to each pile as she went.

"To your house"—she named the piles as she laid down each card—"to yourself—to the one you love best—what you do expect—what you do not expect—sure to come true—this night—your wish."

When she had dealt out all the cards in this way, she turned up the first pile and began to read:

"*To your house:* there is love and good times, lots of fun making. You'll both still be laughing and taking fun out of it no matter what comes. It is all good, good!" She was kneeling at Augusta's side now. There was none of the air of mystery of the professional card reader. She had forgotten that she was giving Augusta a lesson. She was poring eagerly over the cards reading them swiftly as they came up to her, with all of a child's abandon in a game.

"*To yourself:* there is shortness of money. You will be worried about money, not right away, maybe, but some time before very long. And a horse, a horse will be in a part of the worry.

"*To the one you love best:* a dark—!" She stopped and turned about with a swift, tigerish twist of her lithe body. Wardwell, who had been gangling about, amused, and yet feeling somewhat left out of the picture, suddenly found himself pierced by the angriest pair of blue eyes he had ever seen. He did not know what it was about. But from the look the girl gave him he would not have been surprised if she had leapt upon him and buried claws in him.

"What—what is it?" Augusta asked wonderingly.

"Nothing," said the gypsy girl shortly. And she turned back to the cards.

"*What you do expect:* there is sickness and long journeying, and black and white all mixed together.

"*What you do not expect:* deceit. Deceit will break your life." Again the girl turned sharply to eye Wardwell. Evidently he stood the scrutiny well, for she turned back and said quite gently:

"I mustn't do this. You didn't ask me. And you didn't pay me. And I'm only giving you a lesson, anyway. Now just watch and listen." She mixed the cards all up together and began pulling out combinations at

random, reading them in hasty rhymes as she showed them to Augusta.

"Back to back says speedy meeting—Three eights, change of states—Two jacks and a king, a constable bring—Two kings and a jack, an old friend back—" And so on through twenty flying combinations, while Augusta watched the quick brown fingers and listened to the broken rhyming, fascinated, yet feeling that she would very much rather not touch the cards at all. She knew, of course, that she would never think of using them in the way the gypsy girl had suggested. Nevertheless, she was afraid of them. She was sharply conscious that the girl had stopped telling what she saw in the reading because she had thought that she saw something unpleasant, and something connected with Jimmie.

Augusta knew that she could never believe in any of this. It was just the patter of a trade. The combinations suggested the rhymes that went with them. That was all. But, just the same, and although she was very grateful for the help that the girl had given her, Augusta was wishing that Mary Donahue would take her cards and go home.

"Now shuffle the cards and see it for yourself," Mary Donahue wheedled. "You've got it in you—I can see it in your eyes. And when you have that, you can see things even if you don't know the names of the cards. And if you haven't got it, you could study them all your life—I've known people that did—and never know boo."

Augusta took the cards with evident reluctance, but began to shuffle them with an ease and sureness that caught Wardwell's attention instantly. He remembered that Rose Wilding had had an unexplained horror of cards. She had never permitted even the most innocent game of cards in her house. It had been a difficult and,

at times, an irksome restriction. He knew that more than once she had lost good boarders on account of it. But Rose Wilding had persisted in her strong way, with few words, giving neither excuse nor explanation. So he was fairly certain that Augusta had never before held in her hands a pack of cards.

Now he watched with sharp interest Augusta's deft, natural handling of the cards, and, somehow, he did not like it.

With a feeling of growing excitement Augusta laid out the piles as she had seen the other girl do, and without wishing to do so found herself naming over the piles as she went around. She had not thought that she would remember how they ran. But she found that she could not forget if she tried. And it seemed that she did not want to try.

Augusta turned up the first of the piles and looked blankly at them. Her hands were cool and firm, but she felt herself trembling inwardly with a queer, creeping surge of blood. And she drew a quick breath of relief when she saw that the cards meant nothing to her. They were just a jumble of red and black and white, just pictures and spots. She wondered at herself for being excited about it.

"Don't try to read anything from them," the gypsy voice at her ear commanded. "Just don't think of anything, and just keep staring steady and steady until your eyes cross."

Wardwell, watching, felt an irritated impulse to interfere. He hated to see Augusta's delicately sensitized mind submitted to these gypsy tricks. But, man-like, he was afraid of appearing ridiculous if he made any kind of a fuss. For, after all, it was only a little bit of fooling.

Augusta sat limp and stared indifferently down at the cards as she had been told to do. Her eyes fell out of

focus and she continued to stare while the spots and pictures moved about in a soothing, restful sort of blur that lured her mind farther and farther away from the grip of conscious thought.

Without any wish to do so, and without any thought, she began to speak.

"To my house: there is laughter and fear, coming together and in pairs. I must never, never share my house with any third one. There is water laughing by it all the day long in the sunshine, and a bleak wind whistling past in the night.

"To myself: I am starting upon a long, long journey. I shall not rest and my feet will be hurrying always, always. For the end of my journey is hidden in the heart of The Hills of Desire.

"To the one I love best: there is a dark woman, tall and straight, and—"

A quick, visible tremor ran over her, and as though it had touched a spring in her body she sprang into the air like a wounded animal. As she came to her feet, groping and tottering, her head cleared and she saw Wardwell and ran to him.

"What was it, dear?" he said soothingly, petting her head as she hid her face against his breast. "Don't think of it, darling. We both know that it's nothing but nonsense. We won't tell our fortunes, sweetheart. We'll just live them."

Augusta did not say anything. But after a little, feeling the security of Jimmie's arms about her, she turned and looked defiantly, resentfully at Mary Donahue who was unconcernedly picking up the cards and the board from the ground where Augusta's sudden move had scattered them. Then Augusta was aware of the gypsy veil about her head. She tore it off and threw it at the stooping girl.

She was instantly sorry and apologetic. She ran over

and picking it up she handed it to Mary Donahue, who had pretended, very plausibly, not to notice.

Mary Donahue took it and wrapped up the bundle as she had brought it from the wagon. Then she went to put the bundle back where it belonged, at the same time announcing that she must be getting home.

With a final admonition to them not to poke holes in the roof of the wagon, she shook hands with Wardwell, kissed Augusta, and stepped away across the fields toward a trolley line that would take her to New York.

They never saw her again.

In the morning Jimmie saw Augusta struggling with the harness which Mary Donahue had so easily slung under the wagon. He was minded to let her wrestle with it for a while. For, with a sick man's querulousness he was sometimes irritated by the ease and capability with which Augusta got things done. It was a constant challenge to his own frequent periods of helplessness. But he could not be unkind. He came dutifully over to help her.

"We'll have to do this thing in the orthodox way, Augusta, or that horse will laugh himself to death at us."

"I know what goes on first," Augusta defended herself against his implications. "But I don't know the name of it."

"Never mind," said Jimmie. "Go over and get the horse by the mane. Talk to him. Divert his attention. I'm nervous while he watches me fooling about with his necktie and suspenders. "What the deuce is his name, anyhow? In another minute I'll be calling him 'it,' like a baby."

"Why, Jimmie, I forgot to ask!" Augusta confessed blankly, feeling herself convicted of a serious neglect. "Whatever shall we do?"

"Christen him."

"But what good will that do? He won't know that its his name."

"Tell him."

"But, how?"

"How did he find out his name in the first place?"

"I don't know—Oh yes," Augusta brightened, "You just shake the oats at him, or whatever it is for little horses, and you say Dan, Dan, or whatever it is. And that's his name!"

"But suppose it was Alice? Nonsense!" Jimmie argued contrarily. "He'd think it was the name of the oats. Just as if you said Bran, Bran! or Force, Force! or Shredded—"

"Now Jimmie, please stop. And be serious and think. You *know* we've got to call him *something*. Why just think! If anyone should stop us and ask us what was our horse's name. And we'd have to say that we didn't know. And then they'd tell somebody else. And somebody else would stop us and ask us. And then we'd be stopped and suspected and arrested and maybe put in a jail somewhere."

"I wouldn't," said Jimmie basely. "I didn't steal the horse."

He stooped quickly as though he expected something to be thrown at his head. But as his eye caught something on the collar he straightened up exultantly.

"It's all right!" he exclaimed eagerly. "We're safe! Here's his name on the collar."

"Oh, on his collar! I didn't know they did that for horses. Let me see."

"There it is, plain as his nose."

"Donahue," Augusta read. "But that isn't *his* name. That's his father's name—I mean, Mary's father's name—I mean, his owner's name."

"No," said Jimmie gravely. "I'm afraid you don't

understand at all. You see, gypsies are that way. The oldest horse—You will admit that this is the oldest horse—the oldest horse is always called by the family name. You understand, it's just like in England. You know they never think of calling the son and heir by any boy's name. He is not Billie or Teddy or anything like that. He's simply called by the name of the house. He's Kingsmead, or Duncastle, or Ravenwood—So strong, you know, and effective."

"So," he waved his hand by way of introduction, "we have with us, 'Donahue.'"

Augusta crinkled up her little nose. She knew that Jimmie was quite capable of cooking up the whole explanation on the instant. But, as she had no way of convicting him just now, she accepted the introduction and called out sweetly to the horse who was grazing unconcernedly at the end of his tie-rope:

"Donahue!"

He lifted his head. So it was settled. His name was Donahue.

Jimmie glowed with virtuous triumph as he led "Donahue" over to the wagon, slung on the harness and backed him between the shafts.

But as Augusta finally climbed into the wagon she noticed a name painted on the front boxing under their seat. While Jimmie went through the wholly superlative business of guiding Donahue out to the open road—the horse would have done much better if let have his own head—Augusta wriggled skilfully back into the body of the wagon, to search for further proofs of Jimmie's duplicity. Evidently she found plenty of them, for when she got back into her place her face was red with exertion and suppressed anger. Jimmie gave his entire attention to the road ahead, driving ostentatiously with both hands as though he were in the finish of a crowded race—Donahue would not have left his sober, middle-

of-the-road walk for anything less than a roaring motor truck.

Augusta broke out laughing hysterically. Jimmie preserved a dignified, inquiring silence, while Donahue almost broke into a trot.

"The wagon's name is Donahue!" Augusta wailed shrilly between peals of laughter. "Just like the first son in England! And the cook stove is named Donahue. And they call the skillet Donahue. And the name of your bunk is Donahue!"

"Bunk?" Jimmie queried dejectedly. "Was it all bunk? It sounded all right while I—"

"I don't mean slang. I mean the thing you slept on."

"I didn't sleep," said Jimmie, springing nimbly to a diversion of the attack. "I only touched the thing in three spots. And I've got corns in all three places."

"Well, you snored," said Augusta cruelly.

"Never!" Jimmie averred with solemn unction. "I never snore."

"Very good," Augusta agreed pleasantly. "I suppose you'll say it was Donahue."

"This comes of being married," Jimmie remarked warningly to the Hudson river. "Never before did any lady tell me to my blushing face that I snored like a horse."

So they bickered happily through the June morning, careless of where the end of the road might be, the feeling of dependence upon each other and of utter independence of all other things wrapping them together in a nearness that was so sweet and so friendly tender that it almost hurt.

And here at the end of their beautiful first day alone Wardwell sat watching his little lady furtively toss a pinch of the spilled salt over her shoulder. He knew the superstition about spilled salt. Augusta was taking no chances. But he was wondering—as he probably would

continue to wonder during the length of his life—at how little he knew of the real thoughts that went on back of the beautiful blue eyes that looked out so open and unafraid at him and at all the world.

Was she a child that had not learned to know fear? Or was she a woman full grown, so wise in love and strength that she could look down all fear? He guessed that she was both of these things. For she threw salt over her shoulder. And she looked out of those deep blue eyes into the blood-red sunset on the opposite hills across the wide river, and he saw that there was in those eyes a light as brave and unafraid as fire itself. The light is never afraid of the darkness, for while the light lives there is no dark.

The day had been quite unseasonably hot and there were storm clouds piling up like boulders on the tops of the lower Catskills, away to the northwest. The river lay below them, dry-eyed, still, mistless, with a great, terrifying gash of red shot across its bosom where lay the path to the dying sun.

A breathless, heavy hush lay over the valley. Shutting their eyes to the motion of the distant boats, they could have believed that the world had suddenly died around them, leaving them alone and forgotten. There was not a sound, not a ripple of air, not even the whirring of a bat or the cheep of a bird. Wardwell, over sensitive and craving for the homely cheery noises of things moving, stirred uneasily.

But Augusta, child though she was of shut in city walls, had in her enough of the primitive to know that there was a physical cause for the hush that had fallen upon nature. She could feel a storm coming.

How would Jimmie stand it? She had thought of this when she was planning—if indeed she had really done any planning—to make this adventure. But it was a fact that she had thought only vaguely of warm rain

beating harmlessly against the tight roof of the wagon, of falling dreamily off to sleep in the dark listening to the soft patter and drip of rain among the trees.

Now she looked fearfully at Jimmie, and at the frail walls of their home. And she trembled as she thought of the security and comfort from which she had brought him to this, where she had but a bit of dripping canvas to put between him and exposure. Already in the process of mothering him she had come to think of him as a helpless child. And vague, terrifying memories played upon her, of things heard and imagined, of great trees crashing down in forests, of roaring winds and furious, driving rain beating down to death the little wild things of the woods. Now she realized, for the first time it seemed, that Jimmie's life hung perilously on the care that she could give him, that even a wetting, such as, for herself, she could laugh at, would perhaps cost him more than he could gain by days and days in the open.

With a determined shrug she threw off the impression and rising began to rattle the dishes.

"Jimmie," she said lightly "take the pail from under the wagon and go out to the spring for water. I've let the fire die down and now I'll have to build it up again, for nothing but boiling water will take the fat off these dishes."

"You should have camped near a hot water spring."

"There isn't any such thing."

"Sure there is; there's Arkansas Hot Springs—Why didn't you camp there?—And Virginia Hot Spring, and San Antone, and—"

"Take Donahue with you, if you must talk. He'll listen, if you give him a drink."

"Donahue," he said sadly as he unhooked the pail from under the wagon, "we be brothers in calumny. She blackens your character. She belittles my powers

of charming converse. Let us retire to the unfrequented spring and there we shall mingle our bitter tears with the sweet waters."

Donahue saw the pail being taken from its place, knew that the pail was going where there was water, and followed without comment.

Mary Donahue had indicated for Augusta the spring and the camping place. A high wall of hill stood up above the road on the right and out of the hill came the spring. On the river side of the road a fringe of trees screened the little flat promontory in the centre of which the wagon stood. Occasionally the purring of a swiftly driven automobile on the hard road within a few yards of them told them that the world still ran its hustling way, but they were as effectually hidden and private as if they had been securely housed in the middle of some vast estate of their own. And when the dishes were washed and everything put in shape for the night, Augusta brought blankets and they sat perched out on the very edge of the cliff looking down to where the "Central" trains thundered along some two hundred feet directly below them, and out across the broad, dark expanse of the river.

The Albany boat came gliding up the silent path of the river, her tiered, warmly lighted decks looking like a series of summer porches, the steady, even motion of the boat giving to the watchers on the hill the pleasant feeling that she was standing and that they were being gently carried past her.

The searchlight from the boat playing along the hill bank caught the figures of the boy and girl struck out in enormous silhouettes above the rim of the cliff and a merry cheer came up from the boat.

"Go on and mind your own business," scolded Jimmie. "We are no mooning young couple. And we are no subject for flash-light pictures. We are sober married

folks, with our home in the background and a respectable horse in the middle distance."

The flashlight held them for a moment and then swung off overhead and went to peer into the windows of a moving train on the "West Shore." The band on the now receding boat broke into an old fashioned waltz tune which, sweetened and mellowed by the distance and the echoing chording of the hills, came up to them with the softness of a gentle, kindly dream of forgotten people.

The breaking contour of the river soon hid the lights of the boat, and Jimmie and Augusta were left to the great, solemn thinking silences about them, and to themselves, very content.

In the stark blackness of the closed wagon, in the middle of the night, Augusta found herself standing on the floor. She did not know how, or why, she had gotten out of the little string hammock that was her bed. But now she was shocked into full wakefulness. The wagon seemed to be moving and she gave a little scream of terror as she thought of the cliff and the terrible broken fall to the tracks below.

But the roar of the wind and swish of driven rain drowned her scream and she realized that what she thought was movement was just the swaying of the wagon body on its springs.

Reassured, and recovering quickly from her first fright, she stood swaying in the middle of the floor, her hand clutching the wooden side of Jimmie's bunk. He was sleeping quietly, very quietly it seemed, and Augusta had to lean her ear down almost to his lips to catch the stir of his breathing.

The chill of the water laden air caught her lightly clad body and she shivered as her hands went groping over Jimmie's bedding to see that he was all covered and dry. The tugging of the wind at the canvas threatened

her now, not with the fear that it might overturn the wagon or drive it over the cliff but that it might rip a hole somewhere and drench Jimmie.

Again she thought with trembling of the safe refuge of solid walls, of the friendly comfort of feeling that people were near at hand to help if there were need, and a wave of homesick loneliness, a sickening fear of destitution and homelessness, swept over her.

The storm driving high across the chasm of the river struck full and mercilessly at the wagon exposed on the tip of the cliff. Sheets of rain came whipping down the wind, tearing at the canvas and threatening every instant to strip it from the frames. The wind went snapping and howling by like some hungry, angry animal, defeated and driven off for the moment, but sure to come and threaten again. Peals of thunder rolled and reverberated against the rocks, coming every moment nearer and more terrifying as the centre of the storm swept down the river. Augusta straightened up and stood there, it seemed for hours, her eyes staring wide and fascinated, waiting for and cringing under each successive stroke of lighting as it came ripping down through the storm, lighting the black interior of the wagon with a ghastly glow. At last, when it seemed that if she faced another flash of the horrid light she must surely go mad, she sank down to her knees upon the cold floor and buried her eyes deep in the pillow beside Jimmie's head. She wanted to wake him, to creep into his arms and be held, for she was horribly frightened. But he was warm and safe as he was and she felt that she must not disturb him.

After a little she remembered that she must not do things like this. She must be sensible and get back into the warmth of her blankets. She was shivering and chattering with cold and fright. And she knew that she must take no risks of making herself ill. She rose

obediently to the telling of her own good sense and went groping for her hammock. But she felt that she must look outside. If she could only once see the solid world outside and know with her eyes that it was standing still and unmoved while her own crazy shelter rocked and swayed she could feel safer.

She poked a little hole between the curtains at the back of the wagon, for the wind was driving dead at the front, and peeped out. A flash of lightning showed her Donahue, the mis-named, the sturdy, the patient, standing unmoved and uncomplaining in the lee of the wagon. Her heart gave a bound of pity and compunction. She had forgotten him entirely. She had not even thought of his being out there in the storm. He might have walked away, she thought, and found some shed or shelter for himself. Instead, he stood there, dumb and faithful. Impulsively she put her hand out into the rain towards him, and she was thrilled with a sudden feeling of comfort and help as she felt a cold wet nose come up and nuzzle in her palm.

She did not know that the love which came to her in that moment for the big, ungainly, faithful horse would one day spring the trap of life for her and Jimmie. But even if she had known, I think she would still have preferred to love him.

She crept contentedly back into bed. And although the wind howled and the rain lashed mercilessly and she watched nervously all through the night, yet she had none of the panic fear of her early fright. That figure of patient, dumb strength and dependableness standing out there in the storm had given her a courage that would not be easily shaken again.

Towards morning the wind went down, but the rain continued to fall in a steady drizzling mist that ushered in a gray, cold, depressing morning. To Augusta it seemed interminable hours before it was time to get

up and feed Donahue. She thought seriously of making hot coffee for him, but gave up the idea, not because she was afraid of Jimmie's ridicule but because she was not sure that Donahue would understand.

Jimmie slept heavily and awoke feverish and coughing horribly. Augusta could think of nothing to do but to get away from this place. It would have seemed more reasonable to stay quiet at least until the rain stopped, for here standing still she could keep the wagon tight and dry inside. But she could not help feeling that they would be better anywhere than here. Besides, the commissariat was in trouble. When she opened the little chest in the side of the wagon she found that the four bottles of milk which she had bought the evening before for Jimmie's ration of today had all been curdled by the storm. That settled the matter. Jimmie could not have his breakfast until she had found a farmhouse or a country store where she could buy milk. They must move on in the rain.

She bundled out cheerily in rain coat and rubbers to assay the doubtful business of hitching the horse alone, for she would not think of letting Jimmie out in the rain.

"I suppose, Donahue," she apologized, "it isn't proper for a gypsy to wear rubbers. Probably I ought to go barefoot, but you won't please expect that, for a little while anyway. Now I hate to hurry your breakfast," she explained as she brought the bridle, "but you know Jimmie hasn't had any yet, and doesn't know where he's going to get any. And I strongly suspect that you're only pretending anyhow. I'm almost sure," she said peering sharply down into the bucket where Donahue was making a hurried business of snuffing up imaginary oats, "that you finished the last of your oats five minutes ago. Hold up your head, sir."

Donahue did not understand the spoken word. Mary Donahue had a way of slapping him sharply under the

jaw at this juncture. But out of the corner of his eye he saw the bridle and raised his head cheerfully.

The harness was mean and sticky with the rain and the mildew of the night's dampness, and Jimmie had been none to expert in hanging it away so that it would come out right and convenient. But with much tugging and careful study and brave whistling in the rain, and more tugging, Donahue was finally backed into the shafts and the traces made fast. When all was ready and Augusta was about to climb into the wagon she noticed what seemed to be some entirely superfluous straps hanging down towards Donahue's hind feet.

They were, of course, the "hold-back" straps, to keep the wagon from bumping the horse's legs going down hill. Augusta could see no earthly use for them, but she knew they were out of place dangling down there. They gave Donahue a half dressed effect which she did not like. She wondered if she ought to consult Jimmie, but after more study she remembered triumphantly that they went around the shafts. She wound them around the shafts and buckled them up neatly. Knowing nothing of their importance or their purpose, she could not know that the proper fastening home of a hold back strap to the shaft is a thing that must be learned, and learned young. Everything now looked right and neat, so she climbed up and fixed the driving curtain as Mary Donahue had shown her how to do.

"Do you think you'd better start," Jimmie objected through the inner curtain at the last minute. "I'd rather go hungry all day than to see you out there in the rain. I'm not hungry anyway."

"Why, who cares for a little rain. Giddap, Donahue," she sang out tightening up the reins.

Donahue picked his way soberly out through the trees and in spite of Augusta's tugging on the left hand

rein to turn him up the road deliberately crossed to the spring.

"I didn't think you'd ever want water again," Augusta explained her oversight, "after last night."

Donahue took his accustomed morning draught, and, blowing the water from his nostrils, turned sedately and started up the road.

Jimmie sat upon his bunk, fully dressed, shivering miserably and trying to choke down the sound of his coughing. The wagon swayed along creaking and complaining as they climbed the grade. He rose to look out through the rear curtain at the gray, sodden day. He wished that Augusta could not hear his cough. He knew that it hurt her really more than it did him. And he wished, he wished, well—several things. As he stood there, thinking vaguely, dejectedly, he felt the wagon slip forward gently, and then there was a slight bump.

The wagon was yanked forward so roughly that he nearly fell out through the curtain. He caught himself and swaying back was pitched into his bunk. He scrambled up again and clutching desperately at the side of his bunk managed to get forward to the back of the driving seat. Tearing apart the curtain he tumbled into the seat and understood what was happening.

The hold-back straps had slipped loose, the wagon was bumping cruelly on Donahue's legs at every jump, and he was running away madly down a long hill.

The driving curtain had broken down in front of Augusta. She was down on her knees in the wet, her hair flying wildly about her, tugging despairingly at the reins over the dashboard, and praying:

"Oh, please, please, Donahue! What is it? What is it? Please, whoa. I don't care, but you'll hurt Jimmie Oh, please stop and don't hurt Jimmie!"

Then she turned to another quarter:

"Dear, dear God, and Mary Mother, please don't

let Jimmie get hurt. It's my fault! You know I took him out this way. You know he didn't want to come," she appealed. "And I'll be so good. Oh, please don't let Jimmie be hurt!"

Wardwell slipped cautiously down and gathering her up braced her in the seat.

"Hold tight, dear," he commanded. "We'll be all right." And he braced himself to saw on the reins.

But Donahue by this time had the bit in his teeth, and so far as any effect of the reins was concerned Jimmie might as well have been pulling at the dashboard. The horse had no check rein. His head was down, his back flattened out, and he was running like a frightened dog, the wagon jolting down wickedly on his legs at every few jumps.

Jimmie knew that he was as frightened and as powerless as the girl crouching beside him. If he jumped with her, they would be hurt or killed. If they stayed and hung on the horse would surely stumble or the wagon would slew off the road—he looked down the winding stretch of the road and counted the curves and wondered at which one of them they would be thrown over the bank—or they would meet some heavy truck and be crushed.

The crazed fright of the horse came back to the hearts of the two behind him. The mad Rap-a-rap, Rap-a-rap of his frantic feet on the hard road, the wild careening of the wagon, the loud pumping of blood in their throats took from them all sense and thought as the rain beat unfelt upon their faces and trees and rocks and fences whirled drunkenly by.

Augusta was hugging closely now while Jimmie sawed mechanically at the reins, and he heard her praying quietly. His heart stopped beating as he looked down a sudden dip of the road below them and saw a country railroad crossing.

Beyond the tracks the road ran up a hill again. If he could only cross safely, he could stop the horse there where the incline of the hill would hold the wagon back from hitting him.

But because this was all an ordered nightmare, Wardwell heard, just where in a nightmare he would expect to hear it, the whistle of a train. He tried to drag the powerful crazed horse to the side of the road, to overturn the wagon if he must. But he might as well have tried to turn the oncoming engine.

Augusta saw the train coming toward the crossing, as they were coming. She did not cry out, only snuggled a little closer and waited. Then with one last mad dip the horse struck the tracks, and the wagon leaped across in front of the grinding engine.

A gray faced man leaning out of the cab of the engine yelled crazily at them, but they did not hear. Donahue ran on up the hill, until he seemed to miss something. The wagon was not hitting him any more. Then he became conscious of the tugging at his jaw. He slowed down to a weak-kneed stumbling trot, then to a walk, and stopped, shaking and panting.

Wardwell sat a while holding Augusta tight, for now she was crying bitterly in great gasping sobs.

When he had petted and quieted her back to something like herself, he started to get down to fix the hold-backs. He was shaking weakly himself and as he reached his foot down to the step his hand caught something for support. It was the handle of the brake.

He stumbled to his feet on the ground, and turning back, his hand still on the handle of the brake, he broke out into a hysterical laugh.

"Oh Jimmie, don't!" said Augusta, frightened anew.

"Augusta," he said solemnly, "don't ever marry a fool again."

"What—what—?"

"This," he explained, "is a brake, to stop the wagon. If I hadn't been a fool and lost my head I'd have thought of that brake and stopped us right at the start.

"But, anyhow, I think this is enough. We had better go back to the city, where people are paid to take care of us."

Augusta sat a little while thinking, while Jimmie fixed the hold-backs.

"Jimmie," she said simply, "do you think we'll ever go through anything worse than that?"

"No, my dear, we will not."

"Then we've passed the worst, already," she announced calmly. "Let us go and find your breakfast."

V

In the pearl dawn of a lovely July morning Augusta lay in her hammock, happily lazy and wide awake looking up at the line of the hills, watching the rosy light from the sun as it flushed color up into the pale eastern sky. Were these the hills of desire, she wondered, thinking vaguely of the words that had come to her while she studied the cards at the gypsy girl's bidding. The long, sun-drenched, dusty days upon the road, the sudden violent storms, the meetings with people who thought her so queer a gypsy, all had swept into a distant past the impression of that evening a month ago. A happy, busy month it had been, full of new things to be learned, of old, half forgotten things to be remembered, of careful explanations to people who did not listen; and three black, fearful days when Jimmie had been so bad that they could not move, days and especially nights when she had sat crouching beside him and had felt her faith and her dear high hope slipping from her and had frankly feared that he was dying.

Those nights of sinking fear seemed very far off this morning as she lay and looked at Jimmie stretched out along the length of the wagon on the other side, sleeping as smoothly and easily as a child. She could see that the skin still stretched drum tight over his temple hollows and she knew that there were still hollows under his big bony shoulders into which her two hands would fit. But she no longer feared these things, for she could see the vital tan of sun and wind creeping up across his face and driving away the hated pallor and she knew that this was the sign of life for him.

She smiled as she thought of the efforts she had

wasted in trying to tell people the truth of why they were on the road in this way. She loved the freedom of the road, but she did not want to be taken too literally for a gypsy. So she was careful to explain to the farmer's wives to whom she went to buy eggs and milk and in the little village stores where she stopped for meat and bread that she had nothing to trade in the gypsy way, that she was just like anybody's wife travelling in this way for her husband's health. They believed her—everybody always believed Augusta on sight. But on returning to the wagon it was often to find Jimmie eloquently discoursing from the step of the wagon to a moderate sized crowd of people—Where *did* they come from? She would wonder horrified—upon the universal merits of a certain gypsy remedy which had come down to him through a wonderful and ever varying procession of lineal antecedents, and which he was presently going to bestow, at a nominal price, upon this distinguished and intelligent audience.

Humiliated and angry, afraid that she would laugh and yet wanting to cry, Augusta would jump up into her seat and drive brusquely off, Jimmie swaying on the step and waving apologies for his untimely departure. To her shame, he actually did sell three bottles of cod liver oil, which he had himself refused to take. When, however, she caught him dressing up as hair restorer the bottle of harness oil which Mary Donahue's care had provided, Augusta asserted genuine authority and this outlet of his genius was stopped.

But in the matter of horse trading she found that she had no influence whatever. With a cheery hail and a wave of the arm he would stop anybody who drove a horse and proceed to ask pertinent and leading questions about the horse which the other person drove. And if he could but awaken in his listener's eye the faintest gleam of our American rural passion he would

be down on the ground instantly, walking around the stranger's horse, squinting severely at him, cataloguing his points in technical terms wonderfully misplaced, with a dispassionate, steady flow of bewildering language, until his listener in sheer self defense turned the inquiry upon Donahue.

Jimmie would then throw up his head, one ear cocked in the air in that way he had, as though some new and interesting fact had been brought to his attention. Then he would talk of Donahue.

On ordinary days, when Jimmie was in no more than his usual good strain of talk, Donahue was only a pure blooded Arabian bay from a race of desert horses, whose breed and pedigree had been guarded jealously through a thousand years by Jimmie's own forbears. But when Jimmie was having a good day Donahue was apotheosized. He, Donahue, was in fact a lineal descendant of the fay white horses that used to run wild under the lakes in Ireland in the days of the giants. Jimmie reminded his listener truculently that Colonel Roosevelt had written all about these things in his studies of the Irish Sagas, and he dared him to admit that he had not read anything of it. Our rural people do not like to admit complete ignorance of any given thing. They generally agreed that they "had heard something about it."

That was enough for Jimmie's case. Donahue's rusty color proved the matter—Those horses would certainly have turned rusty after all that water.

It was in vain that Augusta explained to Jimmie that these people really thought him crazy, and that they only listened to him and humored him because they were afraid that he would turn violent. Not argument, nor ridicule, nor even tears could break him from his mania of proposing to trade Donahue to every person who drove a horse and who could be persuaded to stop and listen to him. And Augusta could only sit in her

place, smothering her laughter and her anger until he was willing to break off his farce and drive on.

She remembered one awful day in the Mohawk Valley between Little Falls and Herkimer when he had stopped in succession, and labored with, a candidate for Congress, who foolishly tried to sow the good political seed which was quickly blown away in the breeze of Jimmie's zeal, with a butcher, with a jolly old farmer who declared that if he had Jimmie's tongue he would go on the road himself, with a capable spinster who drove a smart horse and plainly showed that she would have liked to crack her whip at Jimmie's ear, with a veterinary surgeon—with whom he nearly came to blows, and with a minister of the Gospel.

Now their way was quieter, for they had left the main travelled roads at Remsen and were faring straight into the heart of the hills. "You can follow the M. & M. from Remsen," Mary Donahue had told Augusta. "We never go that way, for there's no people much and the roads are rough. But that's where the sick people all go. And you'll be all right. Just keep somewhere not too far from the railroad. There's always some kind of a road, and you can't get lost when you're not going anywhere in particular anyway."

Augusta had as yet no definite plans. She had not indeed thought of the need of any plans. Never had two birds set forth on flight into the northland with less thought of the end of the summer than Augusta and Jimmie had taken of where they might be when the nip of chilly nights should come to warn them that the summer was over. Augusta had thought only of a long, long summer of happy drifting before the end of which Jimmie would somehow be wonderfully cured. And beyond that point her thought had not gone.

With the sight of the solid hills before her, into which they had been slowly climbing for some days, it seemed

that the future was suddenly drawing up to them with a sharpened, stiffened outline. The hills looked so definite and decided that it seemed almost an impertinence to go wandering at will among them without object or settled purpose. Their very stillness and the steady, ordered lines of them as they tiered up, hill behind hill, to meet the rising sun, reminded Augusta that even here the rule of order of the world held good. People must not go on too long trusting to the future just because the future is a vague thing and far away.

The days along the road had taught her many things, and here where they were almost in the big woods her eyes and ears were being sharpened in the silences to learn and to understand the life of the little wild things that rustled and scuttled through the grass and twittered in the tree-tops and called sleepily to each other in the twilight.

Last night at dusk she had walked out on a bridge over a swampy creek and had seen a muskrat jump from the tall grass of the bank into the water and swim in a straight line, only the tip of his nose showing above the water, right to his house. Then she had thought only of how swiftly and quietly he had slipped away. Now she remembered that the largest part of his wild wisdom was that he had a home to get into and that he knew just where it was.

And yesterday she had seen a dog chasing another dog—Jimmie said it was a woodchuck, but she had no great faith in Jimmie's wood lore. It was too universal, too impromptu and, alas! too agreeable and accommodating. The woodchuck—if Jimmie was right—had vanished suddenly in the middle of a bare, open field. He had a place to go to and he knew just where it was.

Even the melancholy owls who spread pessimism through the night were probably hooting each on his own doorstep.

She and Jimmie were not fitted with the instincts of these little wild things, to have a refuge always at hand against the storm that was sure to come.

And she had noticed that the smaller these wild things were the better they were equipped, in their apparent helplessness, to escape danger. The little meadow bird building her nest in the open field was the very color of the grass that stood up above her. And the busy woodpecker was invisible against the bark of the tree where he worked for his living.

Looking up at the suggestive strength of the hills Augusta thought how little and how unready people were in this great world that knew so well its own laws and how to take care of itself. And of all people she was sure that she and Jimmie were the least equipped, the least ready for the test of life in the swift sweeping changes that nature's order brings.

A little worried frown came clouding down over the morning light in Augusta's face and a sharp little crease of trouble set itself straight down in the middle of her forehead.

A new sound came now striking persistently at her attention and lifting finally, by a fresh interest, the worried frown. For many minutes she had been listening intermittently and subconsciously to what was evidently a connubial argument in a tree-top. Two birds were talking about her, or at least Augusta took the argument to herself and had been translating it idly into unconscious words while her thoughts were busy elsewhere.

An energetic, housewifely voice had been complaining insistently:

"Why *don't* she get *up-ee*?

"Why *don't* she get *up-ee*?"

And a somewhat sleepy, tolerant, patently male, voice answered back good naturedly:

"Let'er *sleep*, let'er *sleep*."

The colloquy had rambled intermittently into other matters, but Augusta felt guiltily sure that the energetic housewife in the treetop had an eye upon her, for every little while she brought the dialogue back to

"Why *don't* she get *up-ee*?"

"Why *don't* she get *up-ee*?"

And male laziness answered comfortably:

"Let'er *sleep*, let'er *sleep*."

The sound that now broke off her half listening reverie was a short, plunking noise of something dropping into the little pond near which the wagon stood. Could it be that some boy on the hill at the other side was throwing stones into the pond.

She turned on her shoulder to watch the surface of the pond. Certainly there were the ripples spreading out in gentle waving circles from a centre at which something must have fallen into the pond. As her eye followed the waving circle toward the farther bank, right in the line of her vision there sprang straight out of the mirrored water a beautiful, tapering, black, silver and green body, that seemed to hang suspended an instant in a glistening arch and then dropped like a silver knife, without a splash, and was gone.

Augusta lay for a moment staring bewildered at the spot where the vision had disappeared.

Then she sprang for her dressing curtain and began to scuffle into her clothes. "If that fish would only wait!"

Jimmie had bought fish lines at a country store the other day and had rigged a pole after the manner that he had learned during boyhood summers in the country. Yesterday he had persisted in stopping to fish this stream lower down at a place that looked promising. And Augusta had jeered good-naturedly at him, and even Donahue had kicked, when the only result had been that they were all horridly bitten by great black flies.

Now yesterday's scepticism was forgotten. Jimmie should have fish for breakfast!—she knew how he sometimes loathed the milk and eggs that she forced upon him. But even this was an afterthought. She had seen her prey, and the fever of the hunt was tingling in her fingers as she tore the pole loose from its fastenings on the top of the wagon and grabbed a bit of pork rind for bait, jabbing it on to the hook as she ran down to the pond and around to the side where she had seen the bass.

Probably she expected him to be there waiting for her, for when she had looked sharply at the place where he had disappeared, and could see nothing, she did not know what to do.

She remembered that Jimmie had just dropped the bait to the surface and drawn it up again slowly, here and there at random without knowing whether there was a fish near or not. Obviously, Jimmie's way had been wrong, for he had caught nothing; and how could he expect to catch a fish if he didn't know where the fish was?

She decided to wait and see if he would not come up again. He did. Away at the farthest bend of the pond she heard the swish of his body as he leaped and was in time to see the silver flash of him shooting down into the water.

She started to run around the bank, but an instinct of primitive wiliness caught her and, instead, she dropped down flat and motionless in the grass at the very edge of the bank. That fish was hers. She knew it with a sudden fierceness of possession which if she had been able to think of herself would have shocked her. She would have fought the world with teeth and nails for him. But she knew that she would not get him by running after him. She would wait and make him come to her. Slowly and carefully she let the pole

out over the water, the bait swinging gently just above the surface.

The sun was shining down past her shoulders as she lay there watching fiercely, and she was surprised to see the bottom of the pond clearly outlined in rocks and sand. It was her first real sight of sun-shot water in the hills, and to her whose city experience had told her that all ponds were dark and bottomless it would, at any other time, have been wonderful. Now it only meant that she would have that fish if she had to go into the pond after him. There was only one fish, she thought; so the contest was narrowed down to the personal bitterness of a duel.

She saw a thin dark line shoot across a bed of white sand. Could that be merely a fish swimming, that streak of playing lightning that had crossed again, under her fascinated eyes?

He had seen the shadow of the bait moving on the surface of the water, and he was, for a reason about which Augusta knew nothing, even more excited than the tensely nerved girl who watched for him, her head now leaning out over the bank, the weight of half her body resting on one elbow that dug a socket for itself in the dirt at the extreme edge of the bank.

Again he came shooting across over the bed of sand where she could see him clearly, and again, before she had time to do more than edge a little farther out over the bank in her excitement, he flew back across the line of her vision.

Now she was sure that he had seen the bait, for he came shooting past more swiftly, if it could be, and with shorter and shorter dashes, each time swimming closer to where the shadow fell upon the water. Swifter and shorter came his rushes, now almost underneath the shadow of the bait. Augusta trembled in her eagerness to drop the bait to the water. But a cunning in-

tinct told her that he was not ready, that her prey was not yet worked up to the point of striking.

Hard as it was, she must still wait, fearing every instant that he would rise and miss the hook, but not yet daring to drop the bait upon the water.

Finally, when she was grinding her teeth to keep her hold upon her trembling muscles, she saw him coming; this time from a longer dash than he had been taking, and swifter, and straight at the shadow.

She plumped the bait down on the water.

In the little ripple of the surface she lost sight of him, thought that she had frightened him away, had lost him. And the reaction, the feeling of failure turned her weak and nerveless.

She had no time to be conscious of the violent yank upon the pole, for with it she was toppled over the edge of the bank and found herself rolling down into the water.

She was horribly, sickeningly frightened as she struck the water and she did cry out Jimmie's name. But when she felt the pole being drawn from the hand that still held it she gripped it fiercely with both hands and began to fight.

She was on her knees now and struggling to her feet in the water, while the fish shooting about in narrow circles drew the line through the water like a flashing knife. It was battle now, her strength against his strength and cunning. She did not know what to do, except to pull and try to lift him out of the water. And she found that she could do neither, for it was taking every ounce of her strength merely to keep from being jerked from her slippery footing down into the deeper water.

She must somehow get back upon the bank for she had no strength here where her feet had nothing to brace upon. Back and forth along the shifting bank

she struggled, fighting for a foothold, falling and stumbling up again, but never loosening the death grip of her hands on the pole. Her knuckles were bruised and stinging and she knew that her knee was cut where she had fallen, but she had no thought of giving up or even of calling for Jimmie.

There was no joy of battle now, nor was it a game that she played. It was a desperate, racking struggle merely to hold her own, and she was fighting blindly, without plan and without cunning.

Once the pull on the line suddenly slackened and she almost fell over backwards, ready to cry, because she thought the line had broken.

Then straight out of the water and leaping towards her came the fish. Augusta leaped back up the bank, and it was her fright at this point — she actually thought that the fish was coming to attack her — that changed the luck of the battle.

Here, on her feet on the firm ground, she felt that she was the stronger, and while her strength was with her she was going to make one mighty try at lifting him out of the water.

She braced herself, craftily waiting until the fish in his rushes should give her a little slack in the line. Then she threw her whole body into a straining heave at the pole.

At that instant the fish struck downward desperately. The two forces met midway of the pole. Augusta heard a loud crack and found herself tumbling backward, still holding the useless end of the broken pole.

When she looked and saw the other half of the pole shooting across the pond she screamed for Jimmie and gave chase.

As she ran around the edge of the pond Augusta was fighting mad. She was angry now at herself for calling to Jimmie. And at the very first chance she

was going right into the pond and put an end to that fish.

She came around to the side nearest the wagon and here, because it seemed like her own ground, and the sand shelved gently out into the water, she ran boldly in half way to the centre of the pond and grabbed at the pole as it went shooting by.

The first time she missed it in her eagerness and nearly fell into deep water. But she got her footing again and waited. Once the pole sailed by well out of her reach, but the next time as the fish circled he swerved sharply after he had passed Augusta and his quick turn slewed the broken end of the pole around almost to her hand. She grabbed it and ran, literally ran, out of the pond and up the bank, dragging after her by main strength the pole, the line and the fish.

It was a most unsportsmanlike and unfair procedure. The fish could have had her haled before any angler's court and condemned by all the laws and canons of the sport. But Augusta ruthlessly dragged him up through the sand and the dust to the grass.

When she thought that he was safely far enough from the water, she turned to look at her prize.

Donahue, too, sniffing interestedly came ambling along for a view of the happenings.

The sight of the fish did not please Augusta. He was black and dirty and he squirmed disgustingly. And he had covered himself with a loathesome coating of muddied dust.

Her idea of a fish in captivity was of one frozen restfully in colors into the middle of a block of ice in a butcher's window.

When she looked closer at the fish she saw that he was bleeding dirtily from the gills. She turned weakly sick and remorseful.

"I'm sorry!" she cried. "Oh, I'm so sorry! Please

go back. Please! And I'll never fish again!" She dropped limply down to the ground and began to cry bitterly.

The fish was flopping his blind way back to the pond, when Donahue, with every appearance of studied intention, dropped a blundering foot upon the dragging line, and stood still contemplating affairs — thereby saving Jimmie's breakfast.

So Jimmie, getting sleepily down from the wagon to investigate the commotion, found his wife sitting disconsolate and soggy on the grass, her face streaked with muddy tears, the accomplished Donahue standing foolishly ruminative in the middle of the picture, and a very dirty fish fighting for liberty at the end of the line.

Jimmie hurried Augusta to the wagon for repairs, and took charge of the fish.

He cooked it and had to eat it all himself while Augusta sipped remorsefully at the milk and eggs which Jimmie hated.

Now if Augusta had known the reason why her bass had struck so quickly, and so viciously, at her baited hook she would have been much more disturbed and remorseful than she actually was.

The truth is that among river and brook fish the black bass is the only true and proper father of family. The males of the other brook tribes, once their young have been hatched, exhibit only the most casual and meandering attention toward their welfare. They seem to think that they have done enough when they have seen their offspring born in water. Let them swim, then, is their attitude.

The black bass is, on the extreme other hand, a most worried and fretsome pater familias. In the period while his young are dependent and helpless his responsibilities weigh upon him severely. He is worried by trifles, and even by non-existent things, and the

business of being a new father is with him a matter of all-absorbing agitation.

Take a stout man, preferably somewhat bald, just under the line of forty, say, and consider him in the days when his first child has just come into the stages of breath holding and threatened spasms. Regard him as he tip-toes about the house in under-shirt and trousers and worried ferocity. Study him as he walks the floor through the hours of the night warding off imaginary dangers with agitated anger and gentle hearted ignorance. Cross this man at this time in anything that in the remotest way touches the future of his family and you will rouse a deadly enemy.

So your black bass. At all other times he is cautious, wary, worldly wise. But at this time of his family's helplessness he is rash, careless and blind in his hot anger at anything that threatens them. He will strike madly at anything that comes near the surface of his pond. He will snap rashly at a fly, at a twig dropped on the water, at a shadow, at a bare hook, even, if he can see it.

He lives in a constant ramp of shifting, hurrying, belligerent, aggressive defense. He is not hungry or greedy as he seems to act. He is whole-heartedly and defiantly defending his own and his home against what he is convinced is a jealous and a hostile world.

Augusta, mercifully, knew none of these things. She had blundered into tragedy as unknowingly as Donahue's wandering foot had chanced to rest upon the line and save Jimmie a welcome breakfast of fish.

VI

ALL through a long, drowsy, dreamy afternoon while Donahue had taken very much his own way and gait, Augusta had watched the unfolding of the hills before them. They had passed Old Forge and the Divide where the water-sheds drop off to north and west, and were deep in the bosom of the hills. At times, for a little while, they seemed to be on the very top of all the hills, for they could see north, east, south and west, a broken picture of jutting rocks and dipping green, and the blue haze of distance running like a ribbon around it all. Then, for hours, they would be plodding noiselessly along, shut securely in a pocket, with only a few rods of the winding road showing before them and the walls of the hills closed in about them on all sides.

Somehow Augusta knew that they were soon going to find the home for which they were both longing. She knew that Jimmie was weary of the road. He did not say so. He never complained, she had learned that. It was useless to try to know what he felt from what he said. But when he was too quiet she knew that he was either feeling worse again—and it was not that—or he was weary of what they were doing and wanted to be doing something else.

Augusta did not blame him. Indeed she would have been sorry if he had taken too easily to the useless, idle drifting of the road. His restlessness now proved that he was not content to drift towards whatever lay before them. It was the one thing of which she had been afraid when she had taken responsibility away from him and had bundled him off on the road as she had done.

Now she saw that the danger which she had imagined

was not threatening. Jimmie was fretting to get back his grip on life. He wanted to be putting his hand to something, to be doing something, to be getting somewhere. With all his surface nonsense and his ways of an ungrown boy, Augusta knew the hot rage of ambition that had burned within him. And she knew that with returning strength it would come to flame again. It must not be allowed to eat hopelessly at him while they drifted aimlessly along a seemingly endless road.

In the late afternoon they came dropping down from a ridge into Smedley village. Augusta read the name on a white sign over the post office door. It seemed to be the end of the highway, for the road which they had been following appeared just to stumble on weakly, between the six houses on the one side and the four houses and little white school on the other, out into a rising field and to lose itself there.

Augusta went into the post office to buy bread, bacon, matches and soap. While the postmaster filled her order she inquired:

"Where does the road go from here?"

The stout old man beamed benignly on Augusta's happy, browned, open-eyed face. Then he squinted cautiously out through the door at the wagon which was unmistakably gypsy. He could not place her.

"Where was you calc'latin' to go, missy?" he evaded with the usual rural unwillingness to give any information until he had first received some.

"Oh, nowhere," Augusta confessed. "My husband—"

"Then you're right there. You don't need to go another step. This is nowhere. The last place you stopped at was next to nowhere, and Smedley, here, is it itself," he grumbled, without any ill humor. "I been waitin' here forty year for that road to go somewhere. But it aint gone and it aint goin', not so it appears. There aint no place for it to go to. That bacon's been

around here a good while, too," he interpolated thoughtfully. "But the soap's prime—staple as old cheese. No sir, there aint no other place beyond this. This is nowhere. When you get here you have to stay or go back."

"But people do stay here," said Augusta a little thoughtfully, "and live and keep well," she added, eyeing the ruddy, well nourished, well preserved face of the old man.

"Of course they do," he admitted. "What else is there for 'em to do. There's no doctors here, so they can't get sick. And there's no preachers to make 'em think about dyin'. So they just hang 'round."

"But it seems a nice place to stay around in," said Augusta as she stood on the little porch of the post-office and looked around at the comfort and security of the solid little houses with the strength of the hills behind them.

"Any place is nice, if you don't *have* to stay there," the old man grumbled, following Augusta out to the wagon. He took a sharp look up at Jimmie, and seemed to like him instantly.

"If you folks," he remarked pleasantly as Augusta climbed lightly into the wagon, "didn't look so much like a pair of runaway children, I'd say you was looking for a place to make a nest."

Augusta and Jimmie looked quickly at each other and then they both laughed in sudden mutual understanding. They had each been thinking the same thought all day, but neither had said anything of it. Jimmie laughed.

"Do you do a little mind reading on the side?" he inquired, "besides holding up a wing of the United States government and supplying the countryside with dry goods and groceries.

"Well, you know," the old man winked genially, "or

you soon will know, married men has to make a good many shifts in order to scrape 'round."

"You are profoundly right," said Jimmie solemnly, "Mr.—Gamblin? Is that the name I see on the window?"

"Jethniah Gamblin, that's me. Just like a post in the mud. Been here for forty year and sorry for it every minute."

"But you stay."

"It's a habit."

"Yes," said Jimmie thoughtfully, "it's an old habit that people have of staying in places. The fact is my wife and I are just now both tired of wandering, though we hadn't thought to tell each other about it until you mentioned it."

"You see," Augusta took up the explanations, while Mr. Gamblin settled a heavy foot on the hub of the wheel and went into conference with them, "Jimmie hasn't been well. Not really sick, you know, but just—he coughed a good deal. And we came out like gypsies, you know we're not really gypsies at all," she elucidated carefully. "And now I'm sure he's tired of it. It's so easy to tire of a thing that isn't after all quite natural."

"Well now," Mr. Gamblin began helpfully, "there's as much room right in sight here as you'll find most anywheres. And there's a balsam ridge right over that shoulder of hill there that when the wind is right is better for a cough than anything that ever came out of a doctor's shop."

Jimmie, whose eyes still had their trick of watching for the details of every picture, noticed an angry twitching of the vine that screened a window in the wing of the post office building, where, probably, Mr. Gamblin lived. He deduced that there was a woman behind that vine listening. And the woman was getting angry.

"Oh, that sounds so good!" Augusta enthused imme-

diately. "You know, we've only got a little money. And it has to last. You know if we had a plenty we wouldn't have to think or worry at all. But then, if we had money it would be something else."

"Golly! You're right," the old man agreed with a hearty slap on his knee. "And the fryin' pan can't be quite so hot as the fire anyway. So if you can only just—"

"Jeth-*nye*-yah! You left the 'lasses runnin'!"

Mr. Gamblin jumped into the air as though at the crack of a whip.

He came down nimbly on his feet and started a bolt for the door of the post office. He took, however, only a few hurried steps. Then he stopped short with a thud and an angry grunt. He shook himself viciously like an enraged and baffled bull, and it seemed that he was about to roar.

Jimmie knew at once that the woman behind the screen of vines had played a ruse—probably an old one—upon the old gentleman, to make him break off an interesting conversation.

Augusta, not understanding at all, and wishing to go on with the discussion, said helpfully:

"But I'm sure you didn't touch the molasses at all."

Jimmie put his hand warningly upon her arm.

Mr. Gamblin did not appear to hear her. He was standing with his legs braced wide apart. His mild mannered spectacles which seemed to have no relations whatever with his eyes stood out at a truculent angle near the end of his nose. His face and neck were very red and he had the look of a man fighting for breath.

"Forty year!" he muttered belligerently, "just like a post in the mud! An' sorry every minute!"

Then he shook himself and strode stubbornly back to the wagon, placed his foot solidly where it had before

rested on the hub of the wheel, and renewed his conversation in a loud and defiant tone.

"Yessum, there's as good air right 'round here as there is anywhere, and more of it than there is in most places."

Jimmie wondered sympathetically how many times in the forty years the old man had been called away from some interesting doing by that false alarm about the molasses.

"And what's a little cough anyway?" the old man boomed on resonantly. "Why I had a tarnation mean cough one time, my own self, long about twenty years ago, I figure it was, or twenty-five. Come on in hayin' time and hung 'round till the first frost. That's the cure. The first nip of the dry frost just picks it right out. And there you are, sound as a trivet. Just like a post in the mud!"

"I'm sure you are right," said Augusta. "And I know that Jimmie and I are both tired of drifting. I don't think we will go much farther."

"Well, just mosey 'round and see for yourselves. Maybe you'll find just the place you want. And if anybody asks, tell 'em Jeth—"

"Jethniah Gamblin," the voice from behind the vines rasped out spitefully, "don't you dare go bringin' no lung folks to stoppin' here. You know well enough what happened up at Fenton Lake. The sick folks come there and got well, and the well folks took it and got sick. And—"

They did not hear any more, for Augusta had grabbed the whip and brought it down wickedly on the unoffending back of Donahue. The astonished animal started with a leap that threw Jimmie and Augusta backwards in a huddle and nearly knocked Mr. Gamblin flat to the ground.

When Jimmie had recovered himself and gotten hold

of the reins he looked back. The old man was standing almost where they had left him, and although Jimmie could see that he was now white with anger yet there was a droop of humiliation and shame on the kindly, sturdy old figure that made Wardwell genuinely sorry for him.

Augusta was now sobbing hysterically:

"Please, please, Donahue, forgive me! I didn't mean to hurt you! You know I didn't mean it!" She could see the line in the dusty hair of his back where she had struck him and to her eyes it seemed a livid welt. "Oh, how could she be so hard?" she wailed. "I could go back and tear her eyes out! I don't see why God doesn't choke people when they say things like that!"

"There, there, dear," said Jimmie soothingly, putting one arm around her while he steadied Donahue with the other, "we musn't mind that. People say things like that without thinking."

"But she hurt you! And she hadn't even seen you! And I hurt Donahue! And she doesn't get hurt at all! Oh, it isn't right, it isn't right!" she wailed.

"Of course not, dear. But see," Jimmie began, gathering himself to talk Augusta out of her feeling, for it always worried him to see her under a strong emotion, "you know she didn't really mean what she said at all. She wasn't thinking of that, not a minute. She meant something else, entirely different. Do you want to know what she really meant when she said that?"

Augusta stopped tentatively and looked up miserably through her tears.

"Well, what she meant was this," said Jimmie blandly. "She meant that friend Jethniah was philtering too much time over the affairs of a very attractive gypsy. *I* did not matter, and Donahue was just like any ordinary horse so far as she was concerned.

The point was that the bold Jethniah was dallying with a fair female.

"What know we," he declaimed, getting into his stride, while Donahue, comforted and reassured by the well known sound of the harangue, steadied himself down to a walk, "of the restless nights and the heavy days that yonder virtuous woman has suffered from the meanderings of Jethniah? He is a personable, plausible man with a roving eye. He has a gift for conversation and an eye for beauty. Even his references to a post in the mud show a discontented, restless disposition. You heard him mention the post in the mud? It is proof patent that his thoughts are wanderers."

"Then, too, he is a man of consequence and of travel. I saw the stage back of the house. It proves that he himself journeys daily down to the railroad to get the mail, to carry the passengers, if any there be — You notice that I stick to the bare facts, there may not be any passengers, but if any there be—and to mingle with the gay world that whirls by."

"Fifthly and sixthly; he is the postmaster. We can only vaguely appreciate what that means. He has the first read at every postal card that comes into these hills. He knows everybody's secrets. Do you realize the hold that gives him on the imaginations of the female portion of this high and wide community?"

"He knows the ins and the outs. The devious ways of the female mind are to him an open book. He pats the shoulder of widowed sorrow. He consoles the love-lorn maiden and invents all too welcome excuses for the letter that does not come. He is even capable of writing letters himself to take the place of the missing ones. Given the man, the temptation, and the immunity of his position, and there are no heights of rascality that he might not scale."

"I don't care," said Augusta hotly. "I'm sure he is a good kind man."

And that's all right! thought Jimmie, pleased and proud to have drawn Augusta out to argue, and flushed for further triumphs.

"There you have it! He is kind," he echoed. "You have touched the very key spring of his villainy. What man was ever kind but to beguile? From our ancient friend Leander at the swimming bee down to young John W. Lothario himself they all had kind hearts and were willing to share them with any and every lady within the horizon line. And here is our Jethniah the very prize dandler of them all. For forty years he has gone up and down these hills and has ranged far and wide, even as far as the railroad, interesting himself in the trials of beauty in distress, while his own lawful wife and spouse languished behind the vines.

"Think of the tale of these doings that she could tell! And she *would* tell them, too. In fact I'd wager that she *has* told them, numerously, circumstantially, and in detail, for a good many hours out of the forty years," he concluded with a grin.

Augusta was quiet now. She had nestled in close under Jimmie's shoulder and seemed to have forgotten Jethniah and his wife.

"Jimmie."

"Yes, dear."

"Well—Oh—Do you think I hurt Donahue very much?"

Jimmie considered, squinting thoughtfully along Donahue's dusty back. He was sure that Augusta had intended, and had tried, to say something entirely different.

"Well," he answered critically and judicially, "he *does* seem to be unusually sleepy. But whether it is

from the effects of your blow or from the soporific influence of my discourse would be hard to say."

Donahue ambled on up a gently winding track—it was not quite a road—which was entirely of his own choosing.

"Jimmie."

"Yes, dear."

She nestled closer, and Jimmie waited.

"I'm afraid."

"What is it, dear?"

"You."

"Me?" Jimmie inquired blankly, wondering what he had been doing now.

"I'm afraid of the time when you get all well and yourself again. You'll want to wander."

"Like Jethniah, eh? There now, what did I tell you? That's what comes of listening to him. You think that, like him, the whole male world is uncertain, coy and hard to please."

"Please, Jimmie, don't head me off. I'm afraid. I suppose love makes cowards of us all. Do you remember a time when I said that I wouldn't want to keep even a kitten that didn't want to stay?"

"Oh, but that was before we were married!" he explained airily. "We all talk turkey at a time like that. It's the last chance we get. And we spend the rest of our lives trying to pay the bets."

"Jimmie."

"Yes, dear?"

"Do you remember the lady I saw you talking with that day in the Square?"

"Sure," said Jimmie lightly, "Jean Bradley"—They were far away now, it seemed to him, and the name meant nothing to either of them—, "what about her?"

"And the woman in the cards, do you remember?"

"You mean the one the gypsy girl wanted to claw me about? Oh yes."

"They were the same woman."

"Same woman?" asked Jimmie, mentally pawing about for firm ground.

"It was the same dark, handsome woman, in the cards, I saw her."

"Saw——?" For one rare and breathless moment Jimmie was completely dumbfounded. He could not find a word anywhere. But he reacted bravely.

"Well if you saw her," he exclaimed eagerly, "why the deuce didn't you tell her that you'd collect the money she owes us?"

"Please, Jimmie, don't joke. I'm trying to say something that's hard to say. You know when we stood before the priest I promised, in my heart, that if I ever thought you wanted to go away from me I would not only let you go but I would force you to be free, by going away and hiding myself."

Jimmie said nothing. He sat looking stupidly at Donahue's ear, his hands clutching the reins so that they were cutting into his flesh. There was nothing to be said. Better let her talk this out for herself.

"And now," she went on fearfully, "I'm afraid, afraid of that woman. And I'm going to do a cowardly thing. I'm afraid of the test, afraid of myself. Jimmie, I'm going to ask you to promise something. I know it's going back on my own heart promise, but I can't help it—I can't help it!"

Jimmie saw that she was suffering, and trembling with fear and self reproach, and he did the best he could. He said:

"Let's drive back, and I'll choke Jethniah's wife to death with the soap. She's to blame for all this."

"But will you promise, Jimmie?"

"Of course, I'll promise! What is it, dear?" He was ready to promise her the setting sun.

"Will you promise me never to have anything to do with that woman?"

"Jean Bradley? Why, yes, sure I promise, if you wish it. That's easy, and all settled. We'll probably never see her again anyway. But I do wish you had put in something about Jethniah's wife. If ever a woman deserved choking, and with soap—I insist on the soap, it is certainly that woman.

But Augusta was not to be turned aside by his diversion.

"I'm afraid," she confessed, shrinking in closer to him so that she seemed so little and so forlorn that Jimmie instinctively put his hand on hers to stop her, "afraid that I would be coward enough to want you to stay even if I knew you wanted to go. And then you'd begin to talk. And you'd be so kind and so bright and jolly that I'd begin to let myself be fooled. You know how you can talk. You can make anybody almost believe anything. Please, darling," she pleaded, "promise you won't ever use it to deceive me!"

Wardwell silently cursed the gift of his glib and ready tongue, while he tried to find the right words for this. After a little he said humbly:

"Augusta, to your knowledge I'm a good many kinds of a fool. But let me tell you something that I know about you, and me. If I should ever be that particular kind of fool, do you know what would happen? Well, in the first place, you'd know it before I knew it myself. And before I'd get around to know it, you'd snap me loose and send me spinning so fast that I'd never know just what happened."

"Oh, Jimmie, don't let me think of it! I could not bear it, and live."

"There are other, more immediate, things to be

thought of. Our patient Donahue is thinking hard on some of them this minute. In the first place, he is wondering if he is expected to work nights."

Donahue, who was by now accustomed to the name which had been thrust upon him, stopped and looked around at Augusta.

"I'm sorry, Donahue," she apologized cheerfully. "I know you are hungry and so is Jimmie. And it's all my fault. But really we can't stop right here. This is just the middle of a field. We'll just go on up to the edge of that little woods. And there we'll stop all day tomorrow, if you like, and think about things."

Jimmie tightened up on the rein, and Donahue plodded on obediently.

The track which they followed came again to the edge of a brook which they had been crossing and re-crossing now for two days. And they knew from the limpid clearness of the water and the slight thread of its rapid flow that they must be near its headwaters. Across its little valley, straight in front of them, stood a thin wall of tall, handsome maple trees, which thickened and deepened into a heavy green bank of solid forest as either end of the line ran up to the enclosing heights above the valley.

The cool, sharp breath of a hidden mountain lake came down to them, and Donahue smartened up his gait.

As they came up to where they could see through the fringe of trees, Augusta looked one long moment and drew in a deep breath of delight and pure joy in beauty.

A quick grasp of her hand on Jimmie's arm made him stop the horse. But before he could say a word she was out over the wheel and running through the trees, crying:

"It's ours, Jimmie! All alone ours! Nobody told us

about it! We found it all for ourselves. It is all our own!"

When Jimmie caught up to her on the bank of the little lake, she hugged him excitedly and then waved her arm out over the water.

"Oh, isn't it the darling! A beautiful white diamond lying deep in its cushion of green velvet!"

Jimmie admitted quietly that the little five-pointed lake, lying like a precious white jewel embedded in the deep green setting of the wooded hills, was the most beautiful thing that he had ever seen.

The mantle of ready speech seemed to have dropped from him. He had no words with which to answer Augusta's enthusiasm. He stood holding her arm, silent so long that Augusta wondered and looked up at him, with a question.

"This is the end," he answered quietly, "of our wanderings. Here are your Hills of Desire."

Augusta nodded, but she did not answer in words. And Wardwell, watching, saw that strange, strained, listening look come into her eyes—the look that used to frighten him in the days of her trial. The look did not trouble him now, for he could place against it the healthy, rugged browned beauty of Augusta's supple body. Her hold upon earth and the things of life did not seem at all so slender as it had in those days when he had almost feared that she would slip away from him into that strange border land into which she peered and from which she certainly brought back knowledge.

Now as he held her arm, firm and warm and strong with the weeks of sunshine and wind and freedom, he smiled at his fears of those other days and nights. But when she spoke she startled him more thoroughly with the quiet certainty of her fore-knowledge than she had ever done in those other days by her strained and timid glances into the future.

"We shall stay here through the winter," she said, in the even voice of a dream, "for I can see the snow on the hillsides and the lake lying wrapped in ice. But then we will be driven away. I do not know why."

She paused a moment, hesitating, and then hurried on desperately, as though the vision was slipping from her:

"We will both be killed, a long, long way from here. But we won't care!" A little ring, like the sound of defiant laughter, broke up through the monotone of her speech, and it alarmed Wardwell so that he took her forcibly in his arms and almost shook her, to make her stop. But she went on quickly to the end of her knowledge:

"I shall be here waiting for you, and you will come. And we will go on together into the Hills of All Desire!"

She stopped, trembling against him. Jimmie chose not to answer or to make any comment on what she had said. From experience he knew that she probably would not remember just what she had been saying. He wanted to ignore it altogether. He preferred to believe that her nerves had merely become over taut from her excitement of the afternoon and that the sudden surprise of the beautiful little mountain-locked lake had played tricks upon them. He looked about for a diversion, and found one.

Not twenty yards from where they stood, in plain view, though flanked heavily with trees on both sides, and some little distance from the water, there was a small wooden house with an open door. And before the open door sat a man calmly whittling shavings for a fire. As Jimmie stared open-mouthed—he was almost ready to take oath that neither the house nor the man had been there before, that they had both been moved into place there by some stage trick while his back had been turned—the man leaned over from

the low stump on which he sat and heaped the shavings into a neat pile. Then he looked up, and though he certainly saw Wardwell standing there holding Augusta he gave no sign whatever that he was aware of them.

Good manners, anyhow! Jimmie commented to himself.

Then he turned Augusta around to see what he saw, and said quietly:

"I'm awfully sorry, dear. But it seems that someone is here ahead of us."

Augusta looked and saw. But, to Wardwell's relief, she did not seem to be disturbed or deeply disappointed.

"Well, let's talk to him anyway. Maybe he doesn't belong here," she whispered. "Maybe he just happened to stop."

He led her back to where Donahue was patiently nibbling at some sweet maple shoots and wondering when this day was going to end, and taking Donahue by the bridle and Augusta by the arm Wardwell went forward by the track which he now saw led up to the open door and presented himself and his retinue to the leisurely gentleman who seemed to be in possession.

"We didn't mean to come breaking into your camp. Fact is," Jimmie explained, "we just followed our horse. And when we saw the lake we just wanted to stay."

As they had approached the man had thrown some dry sticks on top of the shavings which he had lighted, and he now straightened and stood up regarding them whimsically.

He had seen the wagon through the trees long before they had seen him and had wondered what gypsies were doing here so far from the ways of their trade. Now he saw that they were not of any of the kinds of gypsies that he had ever known. They looked, as Mr. Gamblin had remarked, exactly like a pair of runaway children.

"I couldn't but see the two of you at the lake," he said in a rich, soft, South of Ireland brogue that made Jimmie gasp—he would as soon have expected to be stopped here among the trees by a Broadway traffic policeman as to have heard a voice like that here—"and I saw the faces of you when you saw me. You were two blessed childer runnin' to the end of your rainbow, an' when you got there, when you got there, here was an ould dodherin Dimmick sittin' with his hand already in the pot o' gold."

"But we really hadn't any right to expect to find such a beautiful place untaken," said Augusta easily.

The man nudged the sticks of the fire gently with his foot and looked down at Augusta out of a pair of great, soft blue eyes. He was an enormous man of powerfully rounded build, as tall as Wardwell but so broad and solid of stature that, at a little distance he would have seemed just a well-knit man of medium height.

Wardwell had nothing to say. That wonderful brogue had silenced him completely. And the man's face was one which would have drawn attention in any crowd or setting.

It was a large, clean, unlined face as clear and chubby as the face of a rugged healthy boy. Yet it had in it the same quiet power which the man's giant limbs and torso concealed under their perfect proportions.

Wardwell, on the instant, remembered that he had seen three faces strikingly like this. One was the face of a United States senator. Another belonged to a powerful Anglican bishop. The third was the face of a noted downtown New York politician who was said now to be confined in a madhouse. A fantastic suspicion connected with that third face flashed across Jimmie's brain and probably showed for an instant in his eyes. But he almost laughed in the big man's face at the absurdity of the idea.

This man was different. His loose gray shirt and broad overalls revealed a body that fairly pulsed with the clean health of years of out of doors, while a gentle, fine light of sadness and of wholesome humor played almost imperceptibly in the soft blue eyes. The gray hair, cut down close and crisp, told of probably sixty years lightly and soundly lived.

"I'll be moving along early in the morning," he was saying to Augusta, though he was watching Wardwell with a gleam in his eyes. He had seen the flash of a question on Jimmie's face.

"Oh, but you mustn't do anything of the kind!" Augusta objected warmly. "Why, we'd just feel that we had driven you out of your beautiful camp."

"The camp's here all the year, for anybody. 'Tis a sugar bush, don't you see. Nobody comes here only very late in the fall, to cut wood for the sugar boiling, and then again when the winter's breaking up. But for them two little times, a man might stay here the year round and nobody be a whit the wiser."

Again Wardwell's instinct for news and for mystery was roused. He set himself to watch and to listen.

"Our horse is tired," said Augusta, "and it's night now, so if you really don't mind we'll stay by the lake till tomorrow."

"You may stay on in welcome, the whole year if it suits you. The truth of the whole is, I—"

Evidently he was going to tell something of himself, but in that instant he caught Wardwell watching him and he stopped short.

He hesitated, looking sharply at Wardwell, as though wondering whether he could trust him.

"You may as well stay on," he said finally, with what seemed a sigh of tired, baffled resignation. "For I have to be moving on. The truth is, I—I'm *wanted*."

The effect of the last two words on the listeners was peculiar.

Wardwell, whose mind had been vaguely working toward some such thought as this announcement implied and who might have been expected to be somewhat prepared for it, started sharply and caught Augusta's arm.

Augusta, on the other hand, who had not anticipated the man's announcement by the smallest suspicion and who might reasonably have been expected to be shocked, spoke interestedly and as though in answer to what the big man had admitted.

And this is what she said.

"Did you ever know what it is to go six long whole weeks on stuff that's just been half stewed on a stove that doesn't hold fire enough to really cook anything? We've been doing that until there's just one conglomerate taste in our mouths and we don't know whether we're eating fish or meat. And all because I haven't learned to cook with an open fire. I'm going to borrow your fire right now and beg you to teach me."

The big blue eyes of the old Irishman beamed down upon her in wonder and appreciation. He was about to speak, but Augusta was too quick for him. She had taken her attitude—it was that they were going to consider those last two words of his as never having been spoken—and she was not to be moved from it.

"I have bacon," she rattled on, "that the storekeeper said was as staple as old cheese. No, that was the soap," she remembered, laughing, "and new potatoes, and eggs that were laid this morning, if we want them, and—Come, I'll show you what we have, and we'll make a picnic feast."

She turned away and led the big man towards the step of the wagon.

"My name is Smith," the big man asserted with an effort as he followed her.

"How stupid of me!" Augusta apologized from the step of the wagon. "But, out gypsyng like this, it's so easy to get careless in one's manners. We are the Wardwells. My husband is a writer," she catalogued carefully. "And I am his wife. And our horse Donahue once lived under a lake in Ireland."

The big man turned for a look at Donahue. "Them horses was white," he argued, "I know all about them. He's a rusty red."

"Of course," said Augusta cheerfully as she dived into her stores and handed forth potatoes and bacon, "that's rust, from the dampness."

The big man exploded into a roaring laugh. "God bless the handy liar that made that up for you! I don't think you did it yourself."

"No," Augusta admitted, "it's my husband. You see, inventing is his business. I only quote. And Donahue, who is truly wise, he only listens."

Jimmie was dutifully unhitching Donahue.

"Donahue," he grumbled as he tugged at the girth buckle, "*what* do you know about that?"

"Now, not as between master and servant but as horse to man, give me your plain opinion. Are women born into the world full armed with all the weapons of diplomacy, tact and happy deceit? And if they are not so born, Donahue, I put it to you, who teaches them?"

"Augusta is fully convinced that the man is a desperate criminal. And she waves the whole matter aside, as though he had merely apologized for being without a dress suit, and makes him the long lost uncle.

"I am a stupid man and you are not a particularly brilliant horse. We are stumped, and we know it.

"Come and have a drink."

He led the way down to where there was a little

shingle of pebbles running from the grass bank out into the lake and Donahue walked into the water so as to cover all four feet, for he was old and road wise and he knew the comfort of a cool foot bath after a long blistering day.

"Good idea," Jimmie commented, "cool your feet and clear your mind. We need clear minds around here. Come on now, this is the only lake in the neighborhood. Don't try to drink it all. You'll spoil your appetite and ruin your digestion which is already impaired by sugar bags and other surreptitious gobblings.

"About our Mr. Smith, now," he inquired as he dragged Donahue away from the water, "what do you think? What particular branch of high crime does he favor. He is a specialist, of course. He is far too clever a man to scatter himself on general practicioning in this age of specialists. What do you suggest?

"He is a large round man with a kind eye. He could sell mining stocks. But, somehow, I rather feel that he'd be above preying on widows and school teachers and innocent clergymen. I think he'd prefer some excitement in his.

"He might be a head waiter, of course. But no law has yet been invented to make those gentlemen flee to the woods.

"I'll have to give it up, if you have nothing to suggest," he concluded lamely.

When he had filled Donahue's measure of oats he left him feeding at the wagon and came to the fire.

Augusta was hanging a pot of potatoes over the fire from a long crooked iron hook that was sunk into the ground. The big man had gone down to the brook where, it appeared, he had a string of live fish in captivity.

"Do you think we are wise?" said Jimmie cautiously. "We can't tell, you know. People might be looking for him. And suppose he had taken things and brought

them here. And if we were found here," he worried on, "why, we simply haven't any credentials at all. And we're a deuce of a long ways from anybody that knows us. It might be very mean for you—these country sheriffs, you know, they might bundle the whole of us off to the nearest county jail, wherever it is."

"I don't care," said Augusta warmly, flushing over the fire. "Just look at the man. I *know* he didn't do anything really wrong."

"That's the woman of it," Jimmie argued meanly. "just because a man looks like a well preserved and benevolent Greek god and talks with a soft brogue, then the law of the land must be wrong."

"Well, the law *is* wrong lots of times," Augusta answered evenly. And Jimmie wondered whether women, with all the terrible discipline which nature and human society put upon them, were not essentially more lawless than men; or was it that they had gotten a larger share of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge and actually did know good from evil.

He had no time for any remarks on the subject, for the big man was coming back from the brook carrying a big fish, cleaned and split, on a toaster that was fashioned out of two bent pieces of wire.

"If ye'll just rub in the salt," he said, holding out the fish to Augusta. "It'll not need a deal of it for we'll lash the bacon in with the fish."

"Our table is very little," said Augusta, regarding her folding table as she took the salt from it. "But you and Jimmie can sit and I'll wait on you like an Indian woman."

For some reason Augusta was supremely happy. It was not merely the exciting effect of the feeling that she was flouting the law. And she was deeply touched by the big man's plight as she understood it. But there was about her to-night what Jimmie sometimes called a

mist of happiness, as though she trod on dew rays and moved in a cloud.

"Faith'n I know a trick worth two o' that," said the big man positively. "If you'll just turn the fish against the fire, mam—not over the fire, mind you, but just against it—I'll find a table."

He disappeared into the darkness of the little house, and presently came out carrying a good sized table.

"McQuade's a queer duck enough. But I'll say for him that he does keep his things clean."

"Who's McQuade?" Jimmie inquired with a show of interest. He was nervous. He did not like the position at all. He was, in fact, out of his element. He was a man of city streets, where certain people are paid to take care of every sort of situation. Here he would not know what to do. This man was, beyond doubt, a criminal at large. It was entirely possible that a posse was even at this moment searching the vicinity for him. He would certainly have fire arms about. Wardwell shuddered as he thought of Augusta being senselessly exposed in a desperate affair of this kind. But, since Augusta had set the tone for the party, there was nothing for him to do but to follow her lead as best he could.

"McQuade's a nut," said the big man, placing the table judiciously under a tree to windward of the fire. "He owns this place. He has a fine farm fifty miles down the Parishville road. He has plenty to do, and everything to do it with. And he has a grand energetic Yankee wife to see that he does it. But, an' there's the thrapin' contrary Irish of him, he'd far rather come up here an' sit on the step o' the door an' look out at the lake than to put in the finest harvest that ever was."

"I think he's just right," Augusta argued, glad that a neutral subject had been introduced. For even she, in the heating test of holding the baking fish to the fire and watching the boiling potatoes, was not sure how long

their thoughts and conversation could be kept away from forbidden ground. There were so many things which it would be unfortunate to mention to a strayed criminal.

"John McQuade o' the sunny shade an' the woodbine cottage' he calls himself, and he thinks, because he'd a long sight rather loaf and fish than work his honest farm, that he must surely be some sort of a character. I'm not sure but he half thinks he's a poet, or at the very least a philosopher. In five minutes he can give you more good reasons for vagabondin' than you could argue down in a long day's talk."

"This must be a man worth knowing," said Jimmie.

"He's jealous right away!" Augusta laughed. "He's afraid that somebody's been discovered who can talk more nonsense than he can."

"Nonsense," said the big man sententiously as he picked the potato pot off the fire and turned to drain off the water, "nonsense is the salt o' creation. The maxims of the unwise," he pronounced, hanging the pot back over the fire again, to dry for a moment, "are the gatherings of fools' experience. But, ye'll mind, the fools get far more experience than the wise folk. So, there you are."

He brought the potatoes from the fire and deftly turned them into the dish that Augusta had waiting. Augusta brought the baked fish, and he showed her how to slip it from the toaster, without disturbing the bacon which was cooked right into the fish.

Jimmie, seeing the dusk which seemed to be gathering in upon them from the shadows of the trees, brought the lantern from the wagon and was going to hang it lighted from a tree. But the big man would not hear of this. He would have no smelly lanterns around a sylvan feast, he said. And since he was seconded by Augusta he had his way. From under the house he

dragged out a fire cradle, a wire basket on the end of an iron rod, which is used in the prow of a boat for spearing fish at night. This he drove fast into the top of a stump and filled it with knots of resinous wood.

The strong reddish light had the effect of drawing the darkness down upon them immediately, so that they could not see a thing beyond the radius of its rays. It gave them a feeling of complete isolation from all the world, such as only a campfire at night can give, and, in a way, a sense of security. But Wardwell could not help thinking, and only with difficulty refrained from saying, that it was a foolish thing for a hunted man to so advertise his whereabouts with a light that could attract attention for miles in the hills.

The big Irishman, however, seemed the most unworried fugitive at large.

"No," he declared, as though continuing an argument, "you couldn't do a thing in the world better than to stop right here till the snow flies." It was plain that Augusta had talked plans with him while Jimmie and Donahue were down at the lake. "Or if there is one thing better it'd be to stop right here through the winter."

"But, Lord Alive man!" said Jimmie, appalled at the idea, "we'd freeze to death! You don't know, and I don't want to know, what the cold is like here."

"I know it well. But I never knew anybody yet that froze to death in it."

"Yes, but we're city folks," Jimmie argued. "We wouldn't know how to keep ourselves alive. Don't forget that we've been brought up to hug radiators."

"An' that's the very thing that you must forget. The way to keep warm is not to get cold. Get an ax, there's a good one inside there, and go at the windfall wood here. Agen the time comes when ye'll want the wood for big rousing fires ye'll have a fire up inside of

you shootin blood through your veins in a way that'll let you laugh at cold."

"I'm not sure that I'd have the nerve to try it," said Jimmie doubtfully. "But even if I had there are two things that seem to be objections."

"What two things?"

"Well, first, there's—my wife," Jimmie explained a little stiffly, "she couldn't chop wood, so she'd just naturally have to freeze."

"Leave it to a woman to face any dare," said the big man easily. "She'll come through and laugh, when you'll be fit to cry."

"I know that," Jimmie admitted. "But, besides, there's Mr. McQuade to be thought of. He hasn't yet given us any invitation to move into his camp and use his ax."

"Be easy, then," said the big man promptly. "I'll give me word for McQuade. He'll never miss any bit you use. And I'll warrant that he'll be only too glad to have someone gettin' good o' the camp. There's the big sugar house itself stuck in the hill back of us. The boilin' pans are out and the brick furnace is topped over with sheet iron. The very thing. When the real cold comes ye'll just move in there an' lay your open fire in the very door o' the furnace, an' there ye have a camp snug an' dry an' as warm as ever ye'll want to make it. An' there's full an' plenty of blankets there stowed away for the boys."

He went on expatiating at large and generously on the resources of the sugar cabin, while Augusta listened eagerly and dreamed of the snowbound winter nights with the big fire blazing. Jimmie with his eye fixed firmly on his plate was fighting back a grin. If he could have had Donahue's ear for a moment he would have pointed out to him that this making so free of other people's property was good philosophy

but that it was rather discouraged by the laws of the state.

He did not, however, say any of these things, for, in spite of all, he found himself liking the big man, it was impossible to do otherwise, and Jimmie would have felt it a very ugly thing indeed to have hurt him by any smart reference to his unfortunate position.

"You'll need to get rid of the horse," the big man was advising Augusta, who, it seemed, was already in charge of the practical operations for the winter.

"Horse?" said Augusta vaguely. She was utterly unable to grasp the idea.

"Your horse, yes. It'd take all he's worth to feed him through the winter, and he'd be no use to you at all. In the spring you can buy another if you're wantin' one."

"But you mean—You mean *sell Donahue!*"

"Who else?" said the big man unconcernedly.

"Never, never! You don't understand at all. Why, Donahue is one of ourselves! We could never think of such a thing." And Augusta looked her indignation at Jimmie, as though he had offered the proposal.

"I suppose it would be the practical thing to do," said Jimmie without thinking. "But, of course, we needn't think of it. We haven't come that far yet, you know."

"Well, I don't think we *will* think of it," Augusta returned warmly. "I don't see how you can suggest such a thing, Jimmie, when you know well enough we wouldn't be here at all if Donahue hadn't pulled us every step of the way!"

"Oh well, mam," the big man put in softly, "you see I was only saying what I'd do meself. You'll do whatever you think best, of course. But for your husband, now, as I was saying," he switched skillfully back to safe ground, "put the ax in his hand, an' don't

let him hurt himself with it at first, an' agen the snow flies you'll see him a man as hard as nails an' twice as important, for, say what you will about the pride of brains, there's nothing that makes a man quite so sure proud of himself as to feel the strength bulgin' up in him."

Supper over, the two men helped Augusta with the dishes while the big Irishman dealt out sage counsels to provide for every emergency that might confront the two people who were to stay on here. He seemed to leave no room at all for doubt that they would stay. He refused to hear that they had no right to stay here and use Mr. McQuade's property. In the first place, he argued that McQuade was a rich old curmudgeon who would never know how much or how little of his property they might use. And in the next breath he represented McQuade to be a man of a heart of gold who would gladly move out of his own house and home to leave it to some one who had more need of it.

Jimmie reflected that the arguments were hopelessly contradictory, but as the whole manner of their evening's entertainment had been fantastic and more or less unbelievable he decided to leave study and decision over until the morning.

Augusta was not looking for logic. She had fallen under the spell of the big man's promises for Jimmie's health and she was willing to take Mr. McQuade's complacence for granted.

When they had settled down about the fire and the early evening noises of the woods were dying down to the occasional, lonely cheepings of a restless bird or the far distant, creepy baying of a hound somewhere in the hills, the talk became fitful and desultory.

Jimmie was keenly sorry for the big breezy man who was so cheerfully proposing to leave this place which apparently had been a safe haven and take the lonely,

hopeless trail of a hunted man. And Augusta, always sensitive to Jimmie's moods and thoughts, was depressed and nervous with him. Every happy start of conversation which they tried to make seemed inevitably to turn back to something which must be avoided. They could not ask where "Mr. Smith" intended going, or hope that they might see him soon again, or even offer him provisions out of their own store, without bringing themselves upon the dismal question of what he had done and why he was "wanted."

"Can you shoot?" the big man asked in one of the pauses.

"I can hit things in a gallery, but I never hunted much," Jimmie explained.

"It's not the same thing at all. But if you've the eyes and the nerve you'll very soon learn. And you'll be wanting fresh meat. There'll be plenty of it here—about in another month, birds and rabbits and later on deer. Get a good rifle and learn the times for shooting. Have your license right and see that you keep the law. You might think you wouldn't be bothered here. But the game people would spot you out in no time, and you being a stranger with a gypsy wagon you'd get no shrift at all." Jimmie commented to himself on the stranger's respect for what he himself in common with most people had always thought of as merely a formal law.

"You'll want to hunt, to kill things," the big man stated. "I don't know why it is, but it's a fact. No sooner does a man feel his own life and strength swellin' up in him than rightabout he wants to kill things. And, would you believe it, he thrives on it. Killing, do you know, is one of the healthiest occupations—"

A startling, ear-splitting noise broke out of the silence of the night and moved towards them with frightening rapidity.

Wardwell sprang to his feet and placed himself in front of Augusta. He did not know what he expected to see come driving upon them out of the dark. But the noise, to his city ears, had just one meaning. It was a sharp, staccato, drumming sound on a rising note, and it was apparently coming straight at them. In a way, Wardwell might be said to have been prepared for this. The noise, as he understood it, was quite familiar to him. He was certain that a badly firing motorcycle had been started just a little way off and was now dashing straight for their fire. He quite forgot the trees and rocks, for he could not see them, and stood peering defiantly out into the darkness that fell black and formless beyond the circle of the flare of light. He was convinced that a motorcycle policeman was bearing down upon them. But his only emotion seemed to be indignation at the fellow for driving without a light.

Around to the right another drumming, driving sound broke out and beat and purred upon the same note as the first. This sound also came toward them.

"Surrounded!" said Jimmie bravely, reaching back for Augusta's hand to pull her closer to him—one could never tell, there might be shooting here.

Augusta had risen and was standing right behind Jimmie. She did not understand, but she was frightened because Jimmie seemed to know what the danger was and would not tell her.

The whole action was a matter of seconds. Jimmie turned for a quick look at the big man whose doom was coming thus swiftly upon him. He sat on the stump where they had first seen him, his hands clutching tightly at his knees, his big face red in the glare of the light and plainly working with some strong emotion.

The noise ceased suddenly as the two partridges who had made it got wing in air at last and came flying

over the fire. It took Jimmie some time to believe that these birds, beating with their wide bare wings like flat boards on the ground and underbrush as they ran along the ground until they had momentum enough to take the air, had caused all that noise. But when he did realize it and turned to try to explain to Augusta, he felt extremely foolish.

The big man did not wait for the explanation. He rose hastily from the stump and lurched toward the house, saying in a choking voice:

"I'm goin' in."

Jimmie's explanation, while he took down the flare light and buried the flaming knots in the ashes of the fire, was entirely true and fairly accurate. But it was wasted. Augusta was convinced that someone was trying to hide something from her. She listened patiently, but she had her own argument, which she kept to herself. Jimmie *might* have been fooled that way by two birds. *But*, the other man had been visibly affected, too!

When Jimmie thought she was settled in her hammock for the night, he was surprised to hear her rustle out again and come to his side.

"What *do* you think he can have done?" she worried as she cuddled down to his pillow. "And isn't there anything we can do for him?"

"Oh, don't be troubled, dear. He'll probably be able to take care of himself. I don't hardly think he's done anything himself. Maybe he's just keeping out of the way from something. You know there's always an investigation or some blamed thing going on. Maybe it's only that," he suggested reassuringly. "Get into bed and sleep. You're tired to death."

Augusta gave him a hit-or-miss kiss in the dark, climbed into her bed and went obediently to sleep like a child.

Jimmie listened gratefully to the gentle, even breathing that told him that she had forgotten everything. There was a curious feeling of worry upon him. The alarm which he had gotten from the strange noise had turned out ridiculously, of course, but the possibilities which his imagination had seen in it stayed about, to suggest new pictures of trouble and possible danger for Augusta.

He fell asleep, heartily wishing that they had never seen this man, whoever he was.

He awoke in the bright morning light, to find Augusta standing over him, fully dressed, shaking him with one hand and with the other waving a bit of paper accusingly at him.

"He's gone! He's gone, I tell you!" she was crying at Jimmie, as though he had spirited the big man away in the dark.

Jimmie sat up like a jackknife.

"Is the family silver safe?" he inquired anxiously.

"Stop your nonsense and listen." Augusta gave him another excited shake. "I tell you he's a fraud and a cheater. I said double prayers for him last night, and he isn't any criminal at all! I could be angry at him!"

Now at any other time Jimmie would have gleefully picked flaws in this bit of Augusta's theology. Instead he took the paper quite humbly and read:

"Dear Nice Folks, whoever you are:

"It was a shame of me to take you in like that. But I couldn't help it. It was the suspicious way you looked at me." (Jimmie took this as directed to himself alone.)

"I *am* wanted. The wife wants me home to start the harvest. That was in my mind when I said the thing first. And I kept it up because I wanted to see what'd happen.

"But you will not be angry, I hope. This place is

yours in welcome if you care to stay. I'll be up to see you in the Fall.

John McQuade o' the Sunny Shade."

Jimmie laid the paper down on his bunk and looked at it solemnly and stupidly. After a little he said softly:

"Yes, John, you did everlastingly put one over on me."

Augusta broke all her rules as she announced gravely:

"He had us kidded to death." Then she dropped laughing into Jimmie's arms.

"Augusta," Jimmie howled, between spasms of laughing, "do you remember how I stood nobly in the dense forest while the gatling guns were charging down upon us and announced in a dying whisper:

"Surrounded!"

"And I," Augusta cried through tears of laughing, "I was behind your back all the time motioning the man to take Donahue and fly for liberty!"

"It's a good thing we're married to each other," roared Jimmie. "It'd be a pity to spoil two houses with us."

Augusta got up suddenly. She had made a discovery.

"Do you know," she inquired indignantly, "why that man went away from the fire so suddenly like that. He went away some place to laugh at us!"

"He's laughing yet," said Wardwell, and he went off into another roar. "But, we'll be game, dear. We won't run away. We'll stay right here till John McQuade comes back and has his laugh out."

Augusta went out of the wagon and Jimmie began to dress. With one shoe on and the other in his hand he thought of something. He pulled the curtain of the wagon door about him and called Augusta in a bated whisper.

"For heavens' sake," he appealed, "don't let Donahue hear of this! I never could face him."

VII

JIMMIE was coming down through the woods in triumph. All day he had tramped and hunted over the crests of the hills and he was returning with the spoil. His rifle was slung with just a little angle of careless swagger across the crook of his arm and from the same arm hung two pairs of fat partridges. He knew a great deal more now about partridges than he had known that night, weeks ago, when two of them had given him such a start.

He knew, in fact, a great deal more about many things than he had known that night. And he was a vastly different man. He was still thin, but it was not the pale thinness of before. He was lean and brown, his frame was filling slowly but evenly, and his one care was the procuring of food. For he had the perpetual hunger of the gaunt young animal whose growing cells are ever demanding more and more building materials.

His step had none of the nervous hurry of those who tread city streets. In his rough tramping boots he swung down through brush and over rocks with a long, sure, loping stride which showed that he had forgotten that he had such things as nerves, and though he was physically tired his face shone with the zest of a boy in the game and of the hunter hurrying to his mate with the kill.

As he came down behind the long sugar house he heard Augusta singing. She sang a wonderfully sweet natural contralto, but Jimmie had learned that she hardly ever sang except when she felt lonely—and he knew that there must be times when she was indeed very lonesome, for this was a life which might well have

tested the constant cheerfulness of a staid woman, while Augusta was indeed, in many things, only a highly sensitive and impressionable child. He started to hurry, thinking of the many long hours he left her alone in this lonesome place. But the song arrested him—he had not heard it before—and he loitered a little, not wishing to break in until he had heard it through.

She was singing:

“Gyp, Gyp, me little horse?”

“*Gyp-Gyp*, again sir.”

“How many miles to Dublin?”

“Four score an’ ten, sir.”

“Gyp, Gyp, me little horse?”

“*Gyp-Gyp*, again sir.”

“Can I get there by candle-light?”

“Troth an’ back again, sir.”

“Gallop, gallop, gallop

“Trot!

“I sold my buttermilk every drop.

“*Ev-er-y* drop.”

It was a happy lilting little song that trotted merrily up and down an easy range of sweet and saucy notes, and Jimmie could see “Me Little Horse” dancing blithely along in front of a cart and answering back his part of the dialogue. From the song he knew that Augusta was not singing this time because she was lonely. She was happy. And it followed, therefore, that she was busy at something that her heart was proud of. Jimmie wondered if she had, perhaps, found some new and wonderfully neater way of turning a patch on his clothes. This he had found was one of Augusta’s most thrilling and soul satisfying achievements. But there

was another sound that came hammering into the song as he came nearer. It was a jerky, clicking, amateurish sort of noise, but it was unmistakable. Jimmie's head went up and one ear turned up into the air, listening with unbelief. But there came the stroke of the little bell near the end of the line, and he plainly heard the sound of the carriage being shifted.

"By the Poker of Moses!" said Jimmie to himself. "She's found a typewriter growing under a toadstool somewhere, and she's at it. It won't surprise me if she's got a couple of books written by now. I *knew* she'd get loose sometime."

Sure enough, as he came softly around the corner of the camp house in which they were living, there sat Augusta in front of John McQuade's table, and, strangest of all, she was working on Jimmie's own old machine! The sight of that battered old machine brought Wardwell up stock still with a lump in his throat, for he went back on the instant to a black night, now long ago, when he had laid down such things as work and ambition and courage, and thought that he was done with them forever.

Augusta felt him standing there, though he had made no sound. She turned, laughing.

"I didn't want you to catch me yet," she confessed. "But, I don't care. I can do some whole lines without a mistake. And I just got pounding away at that old song—my Daddy used to trot me on his foot to it—and I was so happy that I didn't care whether you came or not."

"I'll smash the old fraud," said Jimmie looking with pretended savagery at the machine that he loved, "if it makes you feel that way about me."

"Oh, I didn't mean that way at all! Of course I wanted you to come every minute."

"But, how did the blamed thing get here?" Jimmie

growled, still hunting for a pretended grievance. "It wasn't in the wagon."

"It was! It was!" shouted Augusta jumping up in glee. "Remember how you jeered at my hat box, the day we moved from the wagon into the house. When I wouldn't let you touch it, or let you see me move it, you swore that I had another man hidden in it. You said you'd get a divorce."

"But, honestly," she said, coming to lay her hand on his arm, "didn't you miss it, sometimes? I think I've seen you walking around at times and looking through your pockets."

Jimmie laughed. He remembered his nervous trick, when something was wanting to him, of walking about and rummaging unconsciously through one pocket after another.

"People that live in glass houses, shouldn't come home to roost—at least not near you, Augusta. I'm getting afraid of you. You see through me too completely."

"And you know I cleaned out your room at the last moment. I saved and brought every last scrap of your book, even the things that you had thrown away. If you're good, some day, when you've gotten thoroughly sick and tired of chopping wood and hunting, and when I've had some more practice, I'll let you have it all. And then you can start it again, dictating to me. I'll never let you sit over a typewriter again. I'm sure it was that sitting stooped over, and fretting, that made all your trouble before."

At last Jimmie understood the whole significance of the scheme. Augusta, serene and sure in her beautiful faith, had held the breaking bridges of life for him, and, while he had been weakly content to drift down into the depths of unhoping uselessness, she had looked calmly and surely ahead and had already seen him safely across and moving up the heights beyond.

Once he had loved Augusta as a big brother adores and guards a little sister. Again, in another time, their positions had become reversed and he had loved her and leaned upon her and taken strength from her, almost as a child takes strength from a fondling mother. Now in the light of the nobler, mating partnership that he began to understand, he was conscious of another and more wonderful love.

His gun and his game slid quietly to the ground and he took her gently into his arms with a new light of adoring tenderness in his eyes.

When they came, however, to putting Augusta's plans into actual operation Jimmie had his misgivings. He knew himself. And he knew that, with all of his ready tongue and his genial effrontery in talking himself into and out of a situation, he was at bottom shy and diffident. He had never been able to do good, sincere work with anybody watching him. He had always loved to hug and hide his work until it was actually in print. He had never in his life been guilty of reading or even showing a manuscript to a friend. And he was shy now, even of Augusta's quick sympathy and understanding.

What was worse, he found that his mind was sluggish and lazy. After the months, in which he had thought only of rest and sleep and the feeding of his body, he found it almost impossible to spur his mind up to the point of nervous tension where he could create with any sequence. The fires of his brain were banked and choked with the accumulations which the greedy body was piling up for itself. He felt stupid, and yet he found that he could not even get irritated with himself over the fact.

To please Augusta, he kept on trying, for he knew how she must have set her heart on this plan of hers and he would have given everything that was in him to

make it a success. Never in his life had he tried so hard and so consciously to write good lines. But the good lines would not come, even though he sat for hours dictating painfully and slowly while Augusta wrote. He knew that the work was not good, but he would say nothing, secretly hoping that she would soon tire of the drudgery and let him get at the machine, as he was now hungry to do, in his own way.

Augusta did not tire. But in the end she pronounced fatal judgment. One day in the middle of a long paragraph she dropped her hands from the keyboard and looked Jimmie squarely in the eye.

"Nothing but the truth, Jimmie," she demanded, "do I get in your way? This is not your good work."

"Had you noticed?" said Jimmie dryly.

"It is not bad," Augusta explained, springing loyally to the defence of anything that Jimmie had done. "For anybody else it would be perfectly all right. But it isn't just you, Jimmie. It's not just alive, you see. It's—It's—"

"Wooden," said Jimmie shortly and without stress.

Much as she hated to, Augusta let the criticism stand. She threw the cover over the machine without a word. That was the end of a dream which Augusta had been hugging to her heart for months. Now Augusta, as we know, was a high hearted, high handed little lady, and she always knew that her way was right. Remembering this, we may arrive at some idea of what it cost her to drop, without a whimper, even as she dropped the cover over the machine, her dearest, deepest laid little plan, and to say blithely:

"Come on for a run around the lake! Tomorrow you can have a pad and pencil and sit on the back of your neck with your feet up in the window and scribble your own way."

Wardwell knew the cost of it.

The next day was rainy and Jimmie was forced to sit about the house all day. He was still near enough to his recent sickness to feel peevish and irritable when it rained, he hated wind and rain. He grudgingly envied Augusta for the carelessness with which she could run out into the rain. He noticed that she made wholly unnecessary trips out to the stable, away beyond the end of the sugar cabin, to see if Donahue was all right. Donahue was perfectly all right, Jimmie was sure. He did not see that lumps of sugar did the old fool any good, anyhow.

In short, Jimmie was working himself into a thorough stew of working fever, ripping and tearing viciously at the work which he and Augusta had been so faithfully laboring on, and incidentally scrapping down some very good paragraphs which he knew, with a growl of satisfaction for each one, would stand the test.

He did not know that Augusta was having a little cry every time she went to the stable. Neither did he know that the lumps of sugar, which he denounced as being wholly unsuited to Donahue's digestion, were in reality the "thirty pieces of silver," with which, in Augusta's imagination, Donahue was being betrayed. So Jimmie could not know that Augusta, too, was developing a temperament. He was entirely unprepared for its demonstration.

"Rot!" he grunted, jabbing his pencil through something he had just written and beginning to write again furiously, meanwhile trying to sit on his left shoulder blade in the chair with his feet piled up in the window.

The room was small. The stove was smoking a little. It was only three o'clock. There were, for Augusta, interminable hours to be gone through before she could even pretend to busy herself with getting supper. And a certain matter was working vividly upon her conscience.

"Shucks!" she remarked. "I could write a book myself with less fuss, and not lose my temper about it, either."

"Of course, dear." Jimmie answered dutifully. He had not the remotest idea of what she had said.

After an interval of alternate cutting and hurried, excited writing, during which the room might have been moved out into the rain for all Jimmie would have known or cared, so long as he was not forcibly disturbed, it was slowly forced upon his attention that something was going on in the room. He was aware while he worked that Augusta had seated herself at the machine and was clicking away fitfully at it.

That fact in itself would not have been sufficient to draw his attention. He might well have supposed that she was merely practicing, to fill in a dull and rainy afternoon. But there was something dynamic in the air about Augusta. She clicked nervously and tentatively at intervals, and then hammered on viciously and desperately, as though she feared that the thought would escape her before she had time to nail it down in words.

Jimmie's jaw dropped and he sat staring at her in stupid amazement. He could see the delicate lines of her figure drawn tense and sharp like the body of some very beautiful animal straining before a leap. He could see that her whole mind and heart were being thrown into the words that she was driving down upon the paper, and it was not merely his loyalty, his faith in everything that Augusta did, which told him that what she was doing was fine. He knew that she was creating something worthy, by the very power that he saw straining in her effort. She was putting will and soul and a wonderful, untrammelled native intelligence into it, and it could be nothing less than good.

He waited excitedly for the end of the page, to see

what she would do. Augusta was orderly above all other things. Jimmie was making hasty bets with himself as to whether her little god of order would prevail and make her take the paper out carefully and look at it before starting another, as a sane person would do, or would she throw it down and race on with another without looking at what she had done. If she did the latter, then the fever had indeed taken her and she was lost.

He gave a mental whoop of sympathy as Augusta, coming with a bang to the end of the sheet, fairly tore it from the machine and threw it down without looking to see whether it fell on the table or the floor. With the same motion of her swift hands she had swept down upon another sheet of paper and without even waiting to straighten it had jammed it into the machine and was banging away for dear life upon the overlapping sentence.

"Another good cook and honest citizen lost!" Jimmie groaned to himself. "Once that fever has bitten her she won't care which side the fish is burned on." Nevertheless, with the eagerness and adroitness of a thieving cat, he stole across the floor and picked up the paper from where it had fallen, without disturbing Augusta.

He read the page that Augusta had written, without comment of any kind. Then with a sort of stupid solemnity he gathered up the pages at which he himself had been scribbling and examined them gravely, as though his reading of Augusta's page had put them in an entirely new light. He laid down his own work on his knees and beside it he laid the page that Augusta had written, and read wonderingly from one and from the other.

In his own work he had gone back to the point where he had left the story months ago. He had not used a single one of the ideas which he had so laboriously

dictated to Augusta, but had struck into an entirely new turn. Augusta could not have known what he was doing or thinking today. Yet she had taken his idea just where he had left it and she was carrying it through the very drift which he had just today thought of.

He reached into an inner pocket for a fountain pen and examined it carefully. Then he cleared his pad and began to write slowly and precisely. He was not now inventing. He was a critic, a just judge, a man having authority; in short, an editor. He took impartially, with cold and fearless discrimination, from Augusta's paper and from his own. And it was an astonishing fact that he was hardly obliged to add even connectives. A paragraph of hers fitted in after one of his so neatly that there was not a seam of divergence between. And there were even sentences which he could begin in Augusta's words, and end with his own. He was not now excited. He was working with the cool and certain precision of the trained man who has his tools right and is finding perfect materials ready to his hand.

He did not care where the materials came from. He had no compunction that Augusta's thoughts were sacredly her own and that he had no right to use them so. Neither, on the other hand, did he feel the smallest resentment when he found himself bound to drop one of his own best regarded lines and replace it with one from Augusta's. He cared for nothing but what he saw was the excellence of the finished product.

When Augusta had finished her second sheet he rescued it from the floor where it, too, had fallen disregarded, and went on with his editing.

By the time when Augusta's third and fourth sheets came from her hurrying fingers he found that she was reaching far beyond the point to which he had come in nearly a whole day's work. She was going, straight and true, with far less words than he had found necessary,

swiftly towards the conclusion for which he had been merely groping. Now he was really put to it to keep his pace with Augusta's flying thought, to anticipate the hurrying turn of her fancy, to drive in with the thrust of his own quick, excited words.

It was a crazy, disorderly method of work, but Jimmie knew that they were both working on the very edge of inspiration and he knew that it was all good. For two solid hours they worked madly, Augusta all unconscious of the fact that she was taking part in a desperate race. Finally Jimmie saw that she was trembling with fatigue and strain.

He went over quickly and swooped her up bodily into his arms and carried her, protesting, over to his chair. When he had brought cold water and bathed her forehead and eyes, for he knew how they must be smarting and dancing with fever and strain, he said:

"Rest a little, dear; and then I am going to show you something."

"Have you been looking at what I did?" she asked quickly, seeing her pages where he had laid them.

"I have, Augusta, and they're great. And on top of that I've taken the most impudent liberty. But you shall be judge."

"Why? What have you been doing?"

"Well, read this first, will you please, dear," he evaded, giving her the stuff that he himself had scribbled at all day.

"But, it's just like," she said, when half way through it. "I had no idea what you were thinking of."

"I know you didn't," said Jimmie with a grin. "I didn't myself. Now read your own."

She glanced eagerly over it, and for a moment Jimmie was sorry, sorry that the will to write had come to her. For Augusta would be a terrible critic upon herself. Immediately he saw the frown of the artist's

discontent with her work clouding her face. Augusta was too clever not to see the raw and badly tooled places in her own work just as she saw them in his work. And Jimmie thought of several men whom he knew, fairly successful as writers, too, who never knew this discontent, who could sit down and gloat over everything they wrote, fatuously thinking it all good merely because it was theirs. Augusta had gone farther in this afternoon than those men had progressed in years. He counted the cost for her and knew what she would suffer from her own sensitive and merciless judgment. Nevertheless, he knew, with a sort of helpless fatalism, that he would not now try to stop her.

"Now," he said, handing her the finished product which he had made from her work and his, "here is the impudence. It's for you to tear it up or let it stand."

She took it without a question and began to read carefully, while Jimmie stood by waiting for the verdict. He felt that Augusta had every right to be hurt by his ruthlessly grabbing and mutilating to his own purposes her first little heart-wrung work. But he soon saw from her hurrying breath and shining eyes that he had not done wrong.

At the end, she jumped up and hugged him, crying:

"It's fine, Jimmie! And it's yours and mine! *Ours!*"

After a little Jimmie said:

"Yes, the spiteful relatives may say that it has its great uncle's red hair and that they can't imagine where it gets its good looks from anyway, but it's *ours*."

Augusta hid her face in the general region of Jimmie's vest pocket, and when she finally looked up the change of subject was complete.

"I'll have to sell Donahue," she said quietly. And her face was set and steady, as though she had been thinking of nothing but this decision.

Now here Jimmie failed. He should have been ready with argument, balderdash, or discussion of some sort. He knew that Augusta would rather sell her last pair of shoes than sell Donahue. But he was curiously and fatally tongue-tied. He had never, since they had started out upon the road, been able to speak of money with Augusta. He had not at any time formed the slightest idea as to how much, or how little, she might have on which to go through with this venture on which she had staked everything. And he knew, a little guiltily, that it was not altogether delicacy that kept him from asking out and facing the details with her.

He was ashamedly conscious of a little lingering, subtle, unworthy resentment of the way that he had been bundled into this thing without being consulted. And, perhaps because he knew that it was altogether wrong and base, he could not speak, but had gone on weakly leaving all thought and worry upon Augusta. It would have been a simple matter, and he knew it, to have asked her just how real was the need of money. But he could not, or would not, do it.

When he did not answer, Augusta explained.

"We cannot afford to buy feed for him through the winter," she stated, with a matter-of-fact coolness which did not at all deceive Jimmie. "And neither he nor the wagon would be of any use to us in the deep snow."

"But, isn't there some other way? Couldn't I rake up some old stories, or something?"

"No!" And Augusta stamped her foot. "I wouldn't have you stop a minute from the book now for anything in the world."

That was the end of the discussion.

That afternoon was the beginning of a new and bewildering life for the two of them. Jimmie did honestly try to limit the amount of Augusta's work. But he

soon recognized the uselessness of the attempt. She worked furiously when the work came to her, writing pages sometimes while he sweated and growled over a few scratched lines. They were both madly happy, asking nothing of life, or of the world; caring not a thought for the success that might come to them.

They never talked over the work that lay ahead. They did no concerted planning. Each of them began a chapter in his or her own way, without the slightest thought of how or where that chapter was to end. They were independent of plans, these two; for out of their own lives they had learned that the spinning wheel of truth takes no account of plans. One could only start, and keep on to see what the next turning would bring. So it was with the story that came turning swiftly out of their imaginations. It ran its own way with each of them, rushing along smoothly, stumbling, stopping, flashing on again.

Then at intervals Jimmie would stop and take just and unswerving measure of what they had done. At the first, in building the finished story out of the materials which they both had furnished, Jimmie had tried to make Augusta sit in judgment with him, had tried to consult with her as to what should go in and what should be left out. But Augusta would have none of this office. Jimmie was trained in the craft, and he must take the responsibility of selection and rejection. That was the way she put it. And Jimmie answered:

"You're a bigger man than I am, Augusta. Without at least a howl, I couldn't let William Shakespeare—and he's had time to learn some things, if he's been reading the things the critics say about his work—but I couldn't let even him maul my stuff the way I do yours."

"Well, I wouldn't let William Shakespeare do it, either." And Jimmie answered:

"Oh."

So Augusta copied, faithfully and without comment or question, the story as Jimmie edited it.

In this time they were curiously detached and tolerant. They did not demand so much of each other. And, though neither of them would have admitted it, this was a relief. They were very far from being tired of each other. But, it is humanly impossible for two normal, independent willed people to live through the hours of every day and night for months in the exclusive society of each other without feeling a strain. Good nature, good sense, and even gentle, thoughtful love will fail sometime. And two people are, after all, just two human beings.

Now, when the mind of each of them was busy during waking hours with the doings of other people whom it was creating and trying to manage, Jimmie and Augusta each found that the other was delightfully easy to get along with. They came and went, worked or played, and Jimmie hunted and Augusta fished, when Jimmie wanted to hunt and when Augusta wanted to fish. Which arrangement they found to be immeasurably better, after all, than the one in which each had been laboriously trying to do only the things that the other wanted.

Jimmie had not forgotten that the problem of Donahue was before them. Augusta had spoken of it only that once, but he knew that she felt bound to sell the horse and that neither argument nor heart-break would deter her from what she conceived to be duty. He had, however, a hope—which he did not mention—that perhaps Augusta would not be able to sell Donahue, for any amount that would be worth considering, and that, finally, she would allow him to try to get some money out of scraps of stories. He was sure that he could hatch up some fairly good ones now.

So he said nothing, and waited. For them, and for what they had needed, Donahue was the ideal horse. There was none to equal him. But as an article of commerce in the open and unprejudiced market Jimmie did not believe that Donahue would bring very much money. It was probable that most of the farmers in the hills had already more cattle and horses than they cared to feed through the winter. And it did not seem likely that any of them would pay a high price for the privilege of feeding Donahue through five or six months of idleness.

Of course, he underestimated Augusta's perseverance and business force.

On a gray October morning when there was already a threat of snow in the air Jimmie went rabbit hunting over the bowl of hills that encircled their little lake. He took no lunch, for he intended to be home before midday. But rabbits are not to be depended on in any weather. Besides, Jimmie followed a fox for two useless, scrambling hours. Therefore it was the middle of the short afternoon when Jimmie came home. The one big bare room which was the house they lived in, and which Augusta's warming, coloring personality alone had made into a home, was cold and dreary even after the brown bleakness of the hills. The fire must have been out for hours. Jimmie was tired and hungry, and he missed Augusta discontentedly.

Where could she have gone for all this time? She would not be fishing. It was too cold to sit holding a pole. Then where could she be, and why?

He lighted the fire and thought of cooking some bacon. But even the warmth of the fire did not drive away his discontent about Augusta. Suddenly he did not care for bacon. He put it back, and, just to prove that he was miserable, he beat up a bowl of the hated milk and eggs and forced himself to drink it.

He went out to the barn to see Donahue. The horse was not there. Augusta must have hitched up and gone down to Jethniah Gamblin's for provisions. Strange that she should not have told him. He had not heard that they were needing things. He went around to the shed, for confirmation of the obvious. Yes, the wagon was gone.

The utter desolation of the place fell upon him like a physical chill. Everything that was his was gone. He felt depressed and deserted. And there came upon him a cold foreboding that some day, through his own fault, Augusta would go and leave him thus alone, his lips dry and cracking with the caking ashes of dreams.

"Hills of Desire!" he growled, looking around in mockery at the bare trees and the rocky, storm gashed hillsides.

He got the axe and went at his woodpile, not with enthusiasm but with hatred. He had some good sized limbs of trees which had been broken off in a recent heavy storm, and it would have been less wasteful and far more easy to have cut them into proper lengths with a saw. But that would by no means have fitted the frame of his temper at that time. He wanted to hack and hew and destroy. And the vicious, swinging axe spoke his mind, while he grumblingly wondered what Augusta could be talking to Jethniah Gamblin about all this time, anyway. And it was a wonder that that bitter tongued old woman in the window had not put a stop to it before now.

Several times he dropped the axe to go out through the fringe of trees to watch for the wagon returning along the track that came up by the brook. Finally when the early dusk was beginning to fall, he gave up the pretense at the wood pile and went out and watched eagerly and frankly for Augusta. Could anything have happened to her? In fact, he would long ago have

started down the track to meet her, but he knew how Augusta hated even the appearance of being followed. She had made a point of pride of her independence and her ability to take care of herself and to do things in her own way, and he knew it would only hurt her if he made any show of anxiety. So he waited, watching and nervously pacing about along the edge of the trees.

When, at last, she did come into sight over a rise in the path Jimmie could scarcely recognize her.

There was no wagon, nor did Donahue appear ambling along intent upon his own thoughts. Instead, there was just the lonely figure of a little girl, unbelievably little and pitifully alone in the dusk and the big stretches of the darkening hills, trudging uncertainly along a twisting path.

Jimmie could hardly persuade himself that it was really Augusta, for the little figure walked heavily and was disguised with an ugly, oddly hanging bundle that threw it out of all likeness to his Augusta with her free swinging, high hearted step. Altogether there was a look of defeat, of heartbreak about the little figure that caught Wardwell by the throat. For he knew that it was Augusta. And he guessed at what she had done and what she was feeling.

He halloed loudly to her and started running down the path to meet her.

Then Augusta, after she had waved in answer to his call, did an odd thing. She dropped her pack, which had been slung front and back over her shoulder, and went down from the path to the brook. From where he ran Jimmie could not see her, but he knew what she was doing. She was washing her face, to hide things.

She was back in the path and had taken up her pack when Jimmie reached her.

"I sold Donahue," she announced. "I got a hundred

dollars for him. Of course, I had to *give* the wagon away with him. But it would really have been absurd of us to try to feed him through the winter when he wouldn't be of any use to us at all."

Her voice was cool and so matter of fact that for the instant Jimmie wondered. Was it possible that she did not care? That she really was thinking of the money? He took the bag of bundles away from her and stretching his arm about her they fell into step together. But, for the first time within his memory, he felt Augusta stiffen away from him.

He was surprised and a little inclined to resent her coolness. Unaccountably he found himself in a very bad temper and with no possible excuse for it. If he spoke he felt certain that they would quarrel and that he would be wholly and shamefully to blame. He did not speak, but there was a muttering resentment of something stirring up in him. It persisted, until he thought of Augusta as he had seen her coming trudging out of the dusk like some deserted, forlorn little squaw upon the trail. Then his natural insight came to him, and he knew, as well as if he had walked with her, that Augusta had cried bitterly all the way, and that she was now hardening herself against his sympathy lest she should break down and let him see what her day's work had cost her.

He understood now. And the thought of Augusta facing the dreary winter here without her pet and friend made him feel very bitterly the having to accept the sacrifice from her. Surely Augusta must know how he appreciated the sacrifice. But he could not tell her. He could not say a word, for all the time his mind was biting in upon itself and he was mumbling, "Wouldn't it be nice now if I were to speak up and say just what's the simple truth—'I'm awfully sorry, Augusta, but of course you had to have the money to feed me all

winter.' That *would* sound pretty, and comforting, wouldn't it!"

Because he was as ignorant of Augusta as all fairly good men will always be of women, he did not know that Augusta wanted him to say nothing of the kind. What she did want him to do was to take her forcibly in his arms and *tell* her that he understood all that it meant to her. Like all men who think quickly and deeply he did not know the value of the spoken word, to a woman. He did not know that, while intuition and understanding are very well within certain limits, there are certain things which to a woman are never true until she hears them spoken in so many words.

They walked on in a silence that grew every moment more painful, until Wardwell knew that he could bear it no longer. He must say something. At random he said the very worst thing, naturally.

"I had no idea," he ventured, "that anybody would be wanting to buy horses at this time of year."

"Nobody did want to buy. Mr. Gamblin was sorry for me, I guess, and bought him, for speculation, he said. I'll feel obliged to give back the money if he isn't able to sell him again."

"Oh, it was Gamblin, was it?" said Jimmie grumpily. He was not concerned with Augusta's problem in ethics. He had somebody to blame now, and he was furiously angry with Jethniah Gamblin. What business had that old schemer to take Augusta at her word in that way?

They came to the house in silence and prepared and ate a meal that was the most cheerless and dreary that these two had ever eaten together. When it was over and the things were cleared away Jimmie settled into his chair by the table lamp, took up pad and pencil and pretended to believe that he was going to work.

Augusta busied herself for a little while, doing un-

necessary things about the fire, and then stole miserably away to the little curtained corner where her hammock hung.

She had started out in the morning with the glow of sacrifice burning clear and sweet in her heart. And now it was night, dark night. Her sturdy friend, her faithful confidante was gone. She had basely sold him because she was afraid he would eat too much. Men would pass him from one hard hand to another, and he would be beaten for the sin of being old. Meanwhile, she would save lumps of sugar and quarts of oats. And Jimmie did not care.

The glow of her sacrifice was cold and dead and the ashes of it were in her hair.

In the morning Jimmie awakened to the fact that he was alone in the room. He had not heard Augusta go out. Or was it that she had just this instant gone and that her going had stirred him out of deep sleep. He dressed hastily, wondering at his excitement. She had run out to see Donahue. She often did that the very first thing in the morning. But there was no Donahue out there any more, he remembered. And he hurried still more.

Although there was obviously no reason for her going to the empty stable, he still expected to find her there. The door of the stable was shut, but as he came nearer he heard the sound of singing. It was the same little song that Augusta was singing that day when he came home and found her practicing on the typewriter, but there was another sound mingling with the song now. It was like nothing but the rhythmic, rapid tapping of little feet upon a bare floor. Could Augusta be in a mood for singing and dancing after last night?

Jimmie turned cautious and stole away from the door of the stable, around to the side where there were

seams in the stable wall. He would not have thought of spying upon Augusta. But he was worried now. There was something almost hysterical in the sound of the merry little song and the patter of the dancing feet. He knew that she had been deeply hurt last night and that she had been too quiet about it. And there had been a time when he was very much afraid of the effect upon her of any strong suppressed emotion.

"Gyp, Gyp me little horse?"

"*Gyp-Gyp*, again sir."—

The song broke freshly upon him as he gained a view of the interior of the barn. To his eyes, blinking in the bright morning light, it was almost dark within. But a single bar of strong sunlight from a little window right over where Jimmie stood went in and fell directly upon the little figure of his wife dancing in the middle of the floor.

The effect was as though she had thought of an audience and had staged a spotlight on herself as she sang and danced. But Jimmie knew that she had not thought of any such thing. Her little face was as white as a hunted banshee's. Though her feet pattered lightly as summer raindrops on a roof, yet there was pain in them; as though she danced upon the grave of something dear to her. Her song was not loud, but the happy little lilt in it was a lie. For, to Wardwell who partly understood and partly guessed, it was nothing but a wail and a heart-break. And he was dimly aware that he was not likely, either in this life or anywhere else, to suffer anything more bitter than those moments standing there watching and listening.

The dance broke off suddenly, not because it was finished but because Augusta could no longer keep up the pretence.

She ran over to Donahue's stall and leaning her arms on the partition she buried her face in them and

began to cry wildly. But it was only for a moment. Then she raised her head with a brave, challenging shake and said steadily:

"That's all. That's the last, Donahue. Jimmie doesn't care. And I'll never, never let him see how much I cared!"

Wardwell understood now, to the full.

He knew that he should go to her now and try to tell her how much he did care. But just then something sneered within him and laughed at the idea of his "going to her and mumbling about how much he cared, and yet accepting her sacrifice all the time." No, he could not talk to her about it. He must do something to show that he did care, that could not mawkishly take this from her. He must get her pet back for her before he could talk to her. He hurried back into the house and lighted the fire.

When Augusta came in it was evident that she had again visited the brook. She was clear eyed and smiling and her face gave no sign that it had been swept by anything harsher than the sweet cool breath of the morning.

"I was down by the brook," she said, truthfully, "and I saw your fire. From the looks of the smoke, I thought you were trying to burn the house."

"Where there's smoke there's fire. The more smoke the more fire," he said cheerfully, opening a window to let out some of the smoke.

"It doesn't follow," Augusta argued.

"Besides, I'm going hunting."

"Again? Didn't you hunt all day yesterday?"

"No. I followed a fox. It wasn't hunting. It was gambling. But I've got a system worked out to beat him. I figured it out during the night that, at the rate he was going when I saw him last, he will in about three quarters of an hour from now be just turning

on his first lap around the world. I shall be at the turn waiting for him."

"I hope he shows a proper sense of his engagements," said Augusta politely. "It would be annoying if he stopped for a drink or anything on the way. But I wish you had timed the meeting to come off before you filled the house quite so full of smoke. I like to smell the tang of wood smoke. But I don't like to eat it."

They ate a hearty and a cheerful breakfast, and Jimmie prepared for instant departure.

"I may be gone all day," he announced, "It'd be just like the scalawag to fool me and go around the other way."

"It's probably a stray dog, anyway," she teased after him as he started up the hill.

Jimmie went over the brow of the hill out of sight of the house. When he was safe from observation he hid his gun securely in the hollow bole of a tree, and, skirting away around the hills out of sight of the sugar camp and the road, he made his way as fast as his legs could carry him toward Jethniah Gamblin's place of business.

He found the United States post office closed and locked at nine o'clock in the morning, and there was no one in sight. He banged and rattled roughly at the door, for in the course of his morning's walk he had worked up a grievance against Jethniah and by this time he was blaming him for everything that had happened. There was a cautious movement within the store and Jimmie saw a head appear near the window from an ambuscade of flour sacks. The door was slowly opened, a matter of inches, and Jimmie squeezed his way in.

"What kind of a—?" Jimmie began upon his argument. But Jethniah shut and bolted the door and

retreated to an inner citadel behind the barricade of post office boxes.

"What's the idea?" Jimmie inquired. "Have you been tapping the postal revenues, or is it merely the county sheriff that's coming for you."

But Mr. Gamblin had no heart for badinage. He sat down heavily and groaned:

"Just like a post in the mud!"

Jimmie, looking around, saw that the door which led from the store into Mr. Gamblin's living establishment was shut and barred. He guessed, correctly, that the store was a fortress under close siege. There was an old overcoat and a store blanket over the back of Jethniah's chair. It was fairly deducible that Mr. Gamblin had spent the night in that chair. The old man's face bore out the conclusion.

Wardwell suddenly found that his indignation at the old man over yesterday's bargain had disappeared. He was convinced that the buying of the horse from Augusta had brought down vengeance on Jethniah's head, from "that bitter voiced old woman," as he recalled her. Certainly Mr. Gamblin did look punished.

"I came down about the horse," he said, as Jethniah offered no explanation of the situation. "I don't believe you were very keen on the bargain, anyway. And the fact is that my wife misses the horse a whole lot. Of course, a deal's a deal. But if I put it that my wife didn't know how badly she was going to miss her pet, and if I offer you ten dollars over what you paid for him I thought maybe you might let me have the horse back."

Mr. Gamblin struggled to his feet and ejaculated:

"Damn ten dollars! But if you'll only take your cross-eyed, knock-kneed, horn-swoggled shin plaster of a horse, and that calico travellin' house of a wagon

away where my wife'll never see them again, why maybe I can get into my own house again!"

Jimmie laughed. He knew that the old man's anger was not really against Donahue. It was probably the first chance he had had for a good many hours to say a few words, and Wardwell sympathised with him.

Just then the door leading into the house was rattled violently. It was plain that the old gentleman's raised voice had penetrated the door.

"Well," said Jimmie hastily, "I haven't got the money with me now, but I think I can get it before night. And you'll let me have the horse?"

"Any whang-doodled thing you like!" said the old man devoutly, as he reconnoitred towards the door and opened it for Wardwell. "Only get the things away from here before I get violent!"

Wardwell started for the railroad station and telegraph office. It was mid-afternoon before he had an answer to the wire which he sent. And it was later still before the unwilling and suspicious operator grudgingly counted out to him the money for which the message called. But before dark he was back at Jethniah Gamblin's and had handed the latter his money, out in the open yard where a certain unmentioned person might see that this was a bona fide transaction.

Donahue clattered contentedly up the track along by the brook, while Jimmie glowed with the triumph of achievement.

If he had known anything of women, he would have known that he had that day committed the one sin which a woman never forgives a man. And he would already have begun to tremble against the day when he would inevitably be found out. But he did not know anything about women.

Augusta, worried and lonesome, had left the light burning in the house, for it was now dark, and had

wandered up toward the hill over which Jimmie had gone in the morning. She heard the well remembered rattle of the wagon coming up through the trees and came running down, wondering.

She met Donahue squarely in the light from the open door and rushed at him with a little whimper of joy. The old horse reached his head down over her shoulder and actually hugged her to him.

Wardwell came down from the wagon, and was kissed without questions. The questions would come later.

VIII

"THIS was the time the Divil was goin' through Athlone," John McQuade announced, giving the explanation before the fact.

"I remember," Wardwell agreed politely. "He went through 'in standing leaps.'"

McQuade and Jimmie were telling lies in a corner of the sugar house.

It was the first "sugaring off" of the season. McQuade's three sons and two hired men had been in the camp ten days now, breaking roads through the settling snow, scalding out sap buckets and boiling pans, and tapping trees. Jimmie and Augusta, in wonder and ignorance, had watched the men going from tree to tree with augers, boring out a hole in each, into which they drove the wooden spout, and hung the tin bucket beneath. They stood among the bare trees on a southerly slope of the hills where the late March sun of a lovely morning beat warm and strong, and they saw a miracle.

Neither of them had more than half believed that sap would actually run from trees that stood stark and apparently dead. But, as they stood there feeling the drawing warmth of the sun in their own veins, it happened. In the breathless hush of the morning a single drop from a tree near them struck upon the resounding bottom of the dry bucket like the stroke of a little bell. It was a signal.

Up and down the sunny slope another and another and a hundred other echoes of the little bell rang out until the many sounds merged themselves into a single tinkling chorus, and the sap of earth was running free!

Mother nature was not dead. She had slept, and now she was stirring to feed the hungry world. Jimmie and Augusta looked at each other half shyly, as though they had spied upon a Mystery.

That was four days ago, and since then, all day long, the deliberate, unworried oxen had wallowed belly deep through the melting snow, only approximately responsive to excited shouts of "jee" and "haw," dragging on the rough low sledges the hogsheads into which the men emptied the buckets of sap from the trees. Night and day the great brick furnace that ran full length down the middle of the sugar house had roared. Jimmie and Augusta had kept open fire in the front of it during the bitterest of the winter, and Jimmie had many times complained that his back was broken carrying wood for it. But where he had carried armfuls, the furnace now demanded cords. It raced and danced and panted in a furious race with the running sap, for the sap must be boiled down to syrup almost as fast as it ran.

Already they had seen the dark, thick syrup poured into the cans and sealed. And having eaten of it, Jimmie and Augusta, used to the article that is sold in bottles in our cities as pure maple syrup, wondered what must become of this kind which they had now tasted. For certainly nobody that they had ever known had been rich enough to buy any of it.

But they had seen what they were told were the best batches of the syrup put aside for the "sugaring off." The term meant nothing to either of them, for they had never heard of it before. But the constant reference to it and the careful timing of everything that went on in the camp with a sole regard for this event soon made them look towards it as eagerly as if they had been a sugar hungry boy and girl in the camp waiting for nothing but the great day.

To-day McQuade had come for the event. And with him had come Fan McQuade, his wife. She was a tall, slender woman, unmistakably a daughter of women who a hundred years ago and more trailed from Vermont over into our North Country. There was strength and unspent beauty in her face, and in spite of the argument of her three mighty sons she seemed entirely too young to be a mate for John McQuade. Her face was grave and there was a thrifty tidiness about her person and her speech that made you wonder how she had ever come to marry a man like McQuade.

Of course, twenty years after the fact, you have the same wonder as to why almost any woman married her particular man. And most of them will tell you, in what they think are moments of truth telling, that they quarreled with the right man, and just took this one for spite. All of which is probably just as true—and no more so—as it is true that distant fields are greener than the ones we are treading now.

But Augusta did wonder, on sight, how this grave faced woman had given herself to the happy-go-lucky young greenhorn that John McQuade probably had been twenty-five years ago. She wondered, until she heard Fan McQuade laugh. It was a surprised, and surprising, burst of pure merriment, beginning with a startled chuckle and ringing out into a clear peal of sheer joy in fun. Then Augusta understood it all. This girl of a sober race was not herself a fun maker, but she loved to be made laugh. McQuade had made her laugh. And he had then blarneyed his way into her heart, past religious and racial and temperamental differences and barriers that would have stopped a thoughtful man.

However, Augusta reflected, it must have been well with them, for McQuade was still able to make his Fan laugh. She laughed now as she overheard the unfolding of McQuade's tale to Jimmie.

"The Divil was lookin' for a man by the name of Barney McGonigle," McQuade stated gravely, while Wardwell listened with the professional interest and envy of a brother artist.

"Now, this man McGonigle, as I understand it, was a man with a weakness. 'Twas known that he tasted spirits. He had been drunk for two weeks. At the latter end of that time, as luck would have it, he was a little bit wide of his bearings. He wandered into an Orange Lodge.

"The stairway going up to the Lodge room was guarded with a drawn sword, of course. But McGonigle came *down*. He'd been resting on the roof of the place.

"When McGonigle came in the Lodge was on its feet and they were in the solemn act of repeating three times: 'To hell with the Pope.'

"There was some little excitement when McGonigle came in without knockin', and he was fairly on his way to being thrown through the window before the Grand Master could rap for order.

"There was but one of two things to be done. Either McGonigle must be killed outright. Or he must repeat: 'To hell with the Pope,' as they did.

"McGonigle bein' an agreeable man be nature, an' his principles bein' far demoralized in drink, agreed to say it.

"Had they watched him closer they might have seen that he stopped a little before the last word.

"But, after all, McGonigle was a good neighbor, and, barrin' the Seventeenth of March an' the Twelvth of July, a good friend. Along with that, he was the only journeyman farrier in the town. I misdoubt they were only too glad to have him say it any way at all, and be rid of him.

"When McGonigle came down past the drawn sword into the sunshine he was thirsty, for water. He went

down to the lough, thinkin' to drink at least the half of it.

"In the middle of the first dhrink, the Divil leapt down to the brink of the lough and stood forninst McGonigle.

"A word with you, Misther McGonigle,' says the Divil, polite, but firm.

"McGonigle lifted one eye from his dhrinkin' and saw the Divil confrontin him in the shape of a big black horse with saddle and stirrups on him, but no bridle.

"I need me breath for me dhrinkin',' says McGonigle.

"Nevertheless,' says the Divil.

"Gluggle, gluggle, gluggle,' says McGonigle, taking another pull at the lough.

"With that, the Divil lost his temper, an' he stamped an' he lepped till he shook the whole town, an' he shook all the impudence out of poor McGonigle.

"Get on me back,' commands the Divil.

"An' poor McGonigle, with the courage of the whiskey dead in him, an his belly squishin' full o' lake water, had no more gumption than to do as he was bid.

"Then it was that the Divil went bumping through Athlone in standin' lepps, as you've heard. He was tryin' to frighten McGonigle, for he was not sure whether he had him truly in his power.

"Ye said it,' accused the Divil, boundin' high around a sharp corner.

"I said what?' demands McGonigle circumstantial. He knew right well that the Divil would never dare repeat the Orangemen's invocation. For McGonigle in his sober moments was a well read man, and, with a moderate amount of dhrink in him, he was a theologian.

"Come now, Barney me boy,' says the Divil, wheedlin' snarefully, 'ye said it, an' ye know ye said it, an' I know ye said it. So where's the use o' denyin'?"

"'I said,' says McGonigle, speakin' careful an' precise—'To be sure I said part of it under me breath, but I said it—I said: 'To hell with the *Anti-pope*.'"

"Now the Anti-pope, as you must know," McQuade explained, "the Anti-pope was the Divil himself.

"Then there *was* a too-ru! The Divil was that mad that he stood still and lepped straight up an' down. An' he was so enraged at McGonigle that he got his foot up into the stirrup beside McGonigle's, as though he was tryin' to come up at him.

"'Glory be!' says McGonigle, lookin' down between prayers. 'Look at the Omadhon tryin' to get on his own back!'

"But, as McGonigle looked down he saw things. He was an expert farrier, an' he knew that that was no proper foot for a right horse. And, at this point, he was enough of a theologian to remember that once a man sees the Divil's cloven hoof he is not lost yet.

"An still the Divil raged, an' stamped, an' struggled with his foot up in the stirrup.

"That'll do,' says McGonigle, polite but hasty, as he threw his leg free over the saddle, to jump. 'There's no room here for two. If *you're* goin' to get *on*, *I'm* goin' to get *off*!'"

The youngest of the McQuade boys came and laid a pan of clean packed snow on the table in front of his mother. This was part of the essential rites of the sugaring-off. The boys had, of course, barometers and modern polarization tests which told them scientifically when the heavy syrup, the concentration of many boilings of sap, was sufficiently boiled down so that when allowed to cool rapidly it would solidify into a clear brittle cake with a polarization of over ninety-five. Fan McQuade believed in all these things as fully as did her sons. She lived with her boys and never allowed anything in their business, or in new ways of doing old

work, to get beyond her. But she—and they too—still trusted her own test as to when a boiling of sugar was ready to set properly.

So, when their thermometer and barometer showed them that the proper point of condensation had been reached, the boys came with a dipper and poured the boiling sugar before her on the smooth surface of the pan of snow. Then they stood gravely around and watched while the long criss-crossed tendrils of sugar which had been made in the pouring hardened over the face of the snow.

Fan McQuade took a little white paddle of polished maple, as hard almost as a piece of steel, and began tapping gently at the hardening, waxy bars of sugar. As the thin tendrils of sugar stiffened into long crystals she struck harder, and they could hear a ringing from them like the twang of distant skates on ice. Then, as the sugar hardened to full brittleness the bars began to break stiffly under her sharp blows, and then to crack and snap and fly apart like live things.

Fan McQuade and her three sons nodded together in solemn appreciation. Science and tradition were for once agreed. They had caught the perfect boiling off point. And the boys rushed away to pour off the contents of the huge boiling pan into the cooling tins.

Now it was McQuade's time to bestir himself as host.

From the dark outside he brought in other pans of clean frozen snow, which he had carefully prepared against this moment. He laid the pans and paddles about the table and inviting everybody to choose a pan of snow he went to bring the wax syrup. To the uninitiated it looked like a bare banquet, a pan of snow and a paddle. But the eating of "wax" is the one feast that requires neither condiment nor foil.

"This," said McQuade, settling himself behind a huge pan of wax, "is the one time when I can under-

stand this making of sugar. All the rest of the year I think of these groves of idle trees,—there's nothing in the world so idle as a maple tree—and every one of them worth a pocketful of money, and I wonder at Fan's lack of business sense. Why doesn't she cut the timber down?"

He spoke of her impersonally, as though she might have been, perhaps, a neighbor at home in the next county.

"But," he concluded, "when I sit down with a pan of wax in me arms I can understand it all. She keeps the trees doing nothing the year 'round just to furnish her her pan of wax. And, like the good Yankee that she is, she has all the better of the bargain, at that."

"Hear him!" his wife retorted. "And if I dared to have as much as one live tree of these groves cut down he'd go crazy. I think he's a heathen pagan. I think he comes up in the summer to worship in the groves like the old people did in the Bible."

"They were high thinkin' people, I take it," said McQuade, ready for contention. "But the times were against them."

"I wonder," said Fan McQuade slyly. "Or were they leaving behind a good hard job of haying or something when they ran off up into the groves for their sacrifices?"

"That's right!" complained McQuade. "Go on and tell all the neighbors about me and disgrace me! These two young people don't think bad enough about me. The first time they laid eyes on me they thought I was a bank robber, at the very politest."

Augusta and Jimmie laughed happily over the memory of that amazing evening when they had first seen McQuade, and Augusta was starting to tell Mrs. McQuade about their awakening the morning after, while at the same time she was mechanically prodding

about in the snow with her paddle to pick up more wax. She looked down, surprised and disbelieving. McQuade had given her a helping of wax so big that she had not believed that she could eat a quarter of it. And, without thinking or stopping, she had eaten up every bit of it. *And she was hungry for more.*

She looked up in horror, and exclaimed confusedly:

"I beg everybody's pardon. I never piggied anything up so in my life!"

"Don't apologize, dear," said Fan McQuade, smiling down into Augusta's burning face. "We'd've been disappointed if you hadn't done just as you did. I always distrust people who don't forget themselves when they first eat sugar wax. I think there must be something wrong with them."

Wardwell, who had done exactly as his wife had done, had not even the grace to look guilty. With deliberate optimism, he was making a hopeful estimate on how many times he could repeat the performance.

McQuade was in no wise perturbed.

"Take breath, and we'll begin again fair. It's the one thing," he explained, as he started away to bring more, "that you can take too much of to-night, and wake up wantin' more in the mornin'."

On his way to the fire he was stopped by the sound of singing from outside. A loud, defiant voice broke in above the panting of the furnace, inquiring lustily:

"Where, Oh, where, are the vi-shuns of morning?"

A determined knocking on the door punctuated the song. And then the voice answered its own question laconically:

"Gone like the flow-ers that bloom in the Spring time."

"Jethniah Gamblin's warble!" exclaimed McQuade gleefully, skipping to the door. The door had to be kept bolted on account of the heavy draught of the

furnace, so, when McQuade opened it quickly, the stout figure of the postmaster was fairly propelled toward the middle of the floor, while his hat, blown from his head by the force of the draught, made a bee line for the bottom door of the furnace. Wardwell sprang to the rescue, but the old man, with a whoop and a most surprising show of agility, swooped down on the hat as it was about disappearing into the furnace and came up jamming it triumphantly upon his head.

"Just like a post in the mud!" he announced.

McQuade came back from his struggle with the door, and made him welcome.

"Sit in, Jethniah, sit in. Ye know the folks here, and yer as welcome as the flowers ye were sing-songin' about."

Jethniah said "How-dye-do" to everybody and found a place for himself beside Wardwell.

He said nothing, nor was anyone tactless enough to ask him, as to what desperate or devious means he had used in accomplishing his liberty for the evening. But, as he settled his short, fat arms around the pan of snow which McQuade had brought him, there was apparent around his mouth a fine cat-and-canary smile that had its own meaning for every one of his observers.

"I just smelt the sugaring, and invited myself," he explained officially to Fan McQuade.

"I'm sure we would have missed you sincerely," said the hostess earnestly. "But I think John trusted your instincts, for I'm pretty sure he was expecting you to-night."

McQuade came back and criss-crossed everybody's pan of snow with a generous helping of wax, providing a double portion for Jethniah that he might overtake the others.

In the midst of his busy eating, Jethniah was seen to stop and reach hastily into an inner pocket.

"Never tell us you've forgot it!" said McQuade in evident alarm.

"Safe as a hollow tooth!" proclaimed Jethniah, withdrawing his hand, reassured, and beginning afresh at his wax. "Just like a post in the mud!"

Augusta and Wardwell looked at each other, guessing what it might be that was as safe as if hidden in a hollow tooth. But they did not ask, knowing that, whatever it was, it would be better to wait and find out at the proper time.

The fact in the matter was not that Jethniah had feared that he had forgotten something. He was afraid that he had been robbed.

Jethniah Gamblin had a vice. It was not a secret vice. But it was the more persuasive, insidious and devastating in that it was encouraged and abetted by the entire community.

During official hours Jethniah was a faithful servant of the People of the United States, and during the same hours he was an honest weigher of sugar and sundries. But when, at eight o'clock in the evening, he had put out the lights and had, in the dark, taken the postage stamps from their place in the drawer and hidden them in an old rubber boot that stood in a corner, Jethniah reverted to the pursuit of his vice.

Jethniah, to say the worst at once, was a leader in song. Wherever there was a gathering of any sort, within possible walking distance, there was Mr. Gamblin to be found in the midst of it. It had to be within walking distance, for many ignominious failures had taught Jethniah that he could not hitch up a horse and drive out of the barn without arousing deadly and effective opposition to his going. So, Jethniah's goings were on foot, with celerity, and without announcement. But go he did, usually. And he was always welcome, because, at the very first hand, the event of his

coming or not coming gave an immediate sporting interest to the party. Where people in other less favored communities had to get through the early, dragging moments of every social function talking about the weather and fussing awkwardly until the crowd came, the gatherings within Jethniah's range were put at ease immediately by the common interest in the question of whether or not the Postmaster would be able to make his escape from home, and attend. Wagers on the matter were posted freely, with the prevailing odds in Jethniah's favor, this partly through sympathy but largely through faith based on Jethniah's past performances.

Then, when he did appear, he was questioned anxiously as to whether he had brought his tuning fork safe with him. For there had been occasions in local history when Jethniah had arrived at a party without this badge of his calling and authority. On these occasions Mr. Gamblin had explained that he had "somehow missed" the tuning fork. But everybody knew better. Mr. Gamblin had been robbed, temporarily.

In the winter evenings of his young manhood Jethniah had taught singing school in school-houses among the hills. But he had long since given up the professional side of his art, and now devoted himself whole-heartedly to the cultivation and encouragement of song, for song's pure sake.

So, whether it was a wedding anniversary or the aftermath of a quilting or a husking bee or an honest country dance with no excuse whatever, Jethniah and his tuning fork were in demand. For when the riotous edge of the merry-making was dulled people wanted to sing. The songs were mostly sad ones, for people generally get more enjoyment out of sad songs, and there are more of them; but when Jethniah stood up and drew forth his tuning fork, carefully and critically

testing it by snapping it with his finger nail, his face grave as that of a very priest of music, his stout old body swaying to the tune that was already humming in his head, he was in those moments a great man.

That men and women loved Jethniah and encouraged him heartily in his weakness is not to be wondered at. For it is a singular fact that, whereas few persons can persuade themselves that they are beautiful, or profoundly wise, or inordinately brave, and only a very few extremely happy folks can delude themselves into believing that they are all three, yet practically all people in their secret hearts believe that they can sing, or, what is the same thing, that they *could* sing if they were encouraged.

Thus Jethniah, who in the long years had given up the exacting and critical attitude of the teacher and had developed a broad charity in art which looked only to the spirit and good will of the performance, encouraged and gave license to the craving that lies deep in all men's souls, to lift up their heads and howl. Men and women, who, left to themselves, would no more have dared try to sing than they would have attempted to walk a tight rope, shouted themselves hoarse and happy under Jethniah's all-condoning tuning fork.

When McQuade had hoped devoutly that Mr. Gamblin had not forgotten it, he referred, of course, to the justly celebrated tuning fork. Now when Jethniah had eaten all the wax that McQuade could press upon him, and when everyone else had stopped from sheer inability to proceed, McQuade was anxious for further festivities.

But Jethniah was unwontedly reluctant about starting a singing match. He felt half afraid to get upon his feet for he was aware that the centre of gravity in his short, round body had been shifted by the quantities of

sugar which he had eaten so that, standing, he would have been in the state which Physics calls *unstable equilibrium*, and his stomach was so full that, for certain physiological reasons, he was afraid to strain his diaphragm with the effort of singing. He had had a brisk walk against a stiff, cold wind, and the warm, full condition of his stomach and the heated air of the cabin combined to throw a heavy lethargy over him. Jethniah at that point would have given a great deal to be allowed to take a short nap. But McQuade was for immediate action.

"Never tell us ye left your music at home on the piano rack! Ye did not, for ye couldn't, unless ye were to leave your head there too. For it's in that round head o' yours that ye carry the finest ripertor of good tunes and words with them of any man in the country. There's not a postmaster in all these great United States that has the songs an' the music in him that ye have," McQuade cajoled.

"It's right hard on the voice," complained Jethniah, standing on professional grounds, "to sing after heavy eatin'."

"Eatin'?" said McQuade contemptuously. "I don't call that eatin' at all. We'll *eat* after we've had a song or two. You'll sing, an' I'll sing, an' we'll all sing. Out with the tunin' fork!"

"Can't you tell a few lies, till we get our breath?" Jethniah suggested weakly.

"No. We'll have all the night to tell stories in after the girls are in bed. Now we'll sing," McQuade announced mercilessly.

Jethniah brought out the tuning fork reluctantly, snapping it critically and holding it up to his ear and listening doubtfully to the tone. He seemed to be artistically dissatisfied with the instrument and to be very hopeless as to the success of the whole project of

singing. The truth was that he knew he was not in good fettle for singing and he was nervous about Wardwell and Augusta because they were, after all, strangers, and they might laugh.

But when McQuade had cleared away the pans of snow, Jethniah stretched himself as far as he dared and began to take an interest. He struck the tuning fork on the table several times, and as he listened his face became each time a little more hopeful.

Finally he caught the tone satisfactorily and announced, with a rising sweep of his free hand:

"Oh He Hum Ha-a-a-ah," crescendo, and holding the last note while he beamed and nodded hopefully around his audience.

"We will sing 'John Brown's Body' first," Jethniah announced. He arose manfully and smote the tuning fork sharply on the table. And again he gave the key note, this time with authority and confidence.

"All sing!"

It was rather a straggling performance, for the boys and men working around the fires came along two or three notes behind the leaders, and McQuade and Wardwell were so full of sugar that they could hardly do more than grunt. But when Jethniah heard Augusta's voice with him he took mighty heart and together they carried it through to a triumph.

Jethniah now awoke to the possibilities of the occasion. He had come here primarily to eat sugar. But in the prospect of a brilliant singing affair he was willing to forget even the first sugar eating of the season. If only he had not eaten quite so much already!

He next called for "Annie Laurie," and when that went through to a decided success, Jethniah was so carried that he insisted on rendering the "Kerry Dancers," which he had learned on Sundays spent fishing with McQuade.

And McQuade returned the compliment in a way that went to Mr. Gamblin's heart.

"Jethniah," he reminisced, in the pause that followed their latest effort, "d' ye mind the day we were fishin' the Racquette away below Forked Lake, and ye made a little song all out of your own head and sang it for me?"

"Does seem to me now," said Jethniah hesitating. McQuade was the best of friends, but he was an inveterate joker and Jethniah was always a little afraid of his humor when there was company. "But I can't just think right now. What about it?" he inquired cautiously. He remembered the little song very well. He had been humming it to himself ever since that day last summer when he had sung it for McQuade, but he had never had the hardihood to bring it out and teach it to people as his own composition. Jethniah was a kindly man, and easily hurt; and in this matter he had all of the fledgling author's fear of ridicule.

"Then it's me that remembers," said McQuade, triumphantly pulling a wallet from his hip pocket. From the wallet he drew out a little account book and found in it the page for which he looked. He handed it, open, to Jethniah, saying:

"There it's for you now. I copied it fair that day an' told you it ought to be in print. Let's hear it now, Jethniah, and we'll all learn it and give it a rousin' send off. Sing up, man! Sing up!"

Mr. Gamblin took the little book and began adjusting his spectacles to his kindling eyes. He was so proud and so pleased with McQuade's graceful thought that his hand shook as he held the little book up to the light of a lantern. Of course he knew the words by heart, but not for worlds would he have foregone the heady delight of reading his own work as it had been copied by some one who had thought well of it. It was almost as good as if he had actually seen it in print.

Finally he turned to McQuade and looked up at him over the rims of the spectacles. There was a misty dimness in the kindly, honest old eyes as he silently thanked his friend.

"Sing up, man. Sing up—Or I'll howl it meself!" blustered McQuade.

Jethniah began to hum, and then to sing tentatively. But his enthusiasm quickly mounted above his shyness, and grasping the tuning fork in a stout hand he brought it down sharply on the table. Then taking the fresh tone boldly and beating time with McQuade's little book in one hand and the tuning fork in the other, he struck bravely into his little song.

Sang Jethniah:

"Get up with the sun in the *morn-ing*,
Now *that's* a beautiful thing.
Lie low in your bed till the *noon-time*,
Now *that's* a beautiful thing.

"Work hard till the end like a *good* man,
Now *that's* a beautiful thing.
Come fishing and sing till the *sun-down*,
Now *that's* a beautiful thing.

"Who picks out my work for the *Long Day*,
Tell Him I want to do *both* things.
Tell Him I want to do *both* things."

Never did poet and songster have a happier audience for his maiden effort, for before he had gotten to the second verse they were joining him in the refrain and assuring him that *that* was a beautiful thing. And when it was finished McQuade led round after round of applause, while the boys roared and cheered around the fires.

"Again!" shouted McQuade. "Let us hear it again, till we learn it, an' we'll sing the roof off with it."

Again Jethniah smote the table with the tuning fork and sang now as though he would burst his stout old heart. And then they all stood about him, the boys towering and blackened like young Vulcans from their work among the fires, and Jethniah led a triumph that roared above the panting of the fires and shook the rafters of the solid old cabin. It was the supreme moment of Jethniah's life. And McQuade, whose heart was big for his friend's glory—and who dearly loved a racket anyway—wanted to fill that moment to the very brim. Again and again they had to sing through the song, until, in very pity for Jethniah, Fan McQuade put a partial stop upon the performance.

"Are you trying to save sugar by making your guests sing all night," she said pointedly to her husband.

McQuade apologized loudly and ran for the snow pans. They sat down again, and, to Wardwell's astonished delight and to Augusta's dismay, they found that their appetite for wax was practically undulled.

But Augusta soon saw that Fan McQuade was very tired—she and McQuade, since sun-rise, had driven fifty miles over the most frightful of roads—and Augusta herself was glad to have this as an excuse for pleading that she and Mrs. McQuade be allowed to retire to their beds in the little camp house, for she knew that as long as she stayed she would inevitably eat more sugar, and, in spite of McQuade's assurances, she was afraid of the consequences.

As McQuade had predicted, they told lies after the "girls" were gone to bed. But it was evident that the singing was not neglected. For, ever and again during the night, Augusta, dozing lightly in her hammock, was awakened to listen sleepily to Jethniah's pleasant philosophy of a future in which he would like to be up

and doing and be dozing abed, be working and loafing, all at the same time.

Augusta and Wardwell long remembered this night. It was not that it was marked by any occurrence vital to themselves. It was merely the first night since they had come out upon the road that they had been separated. But it was full of new experiences for them, and somehow it seemed to mark an epoch, to put an end to one thing and to begin another.

McQuade and his Fan left the next day, already anxious to be at home, for Spring on the big dairy farm that was their home was a busy and important time.

Other parties, invited by the McQuade boys, and some that were not invited, came to eat sugar. But Jimmie and Augusta did not join in any of these festivities. Augusta knew that few people had Mr. Gamblin's ready sympathy or McQuade's big, hearty understanding. She did not care to be stared at and questioned as the curiosity that had come into the country in a gypsy wagon and had lived so strangely all winter in the sugar camp. She had learned that a sparsely settled country neighborhood is the most inquisitive and imaginative community in the world. And while she had laughed with Wardwell over the strange stories that were told, and believed, to account for their presence here, yet she did not propose to put herself upon exhibition.

The sugar season was over quickly, for the sap runs only in the brief period while the frost is actually leaving the ground, and it was a matter only of days until the men were hurriedly gathering the buckets and scalding them out and scouring the boiling pans to be stored away for the year under the rafters of the big cabin. Then they loaded their ox carts with the golden garnering of their hard work and drove shouting away down roads that were mere wallows of soft snow and mud.

Augusta and Jimmie turned gladly back to the freedom and the quiet of their work. It had been a most wonderful winter for them. There must, in the actual constitution of human nature, have been times when they were both horribly lonesome, when they must have longed for something to happen or for the sight of a new face. But there was very little that was petty or unforgiving in either of them, and love, which came deeper and sweeter to them with every turning day, with growing understanding of each other, with little unthought, unstudied kindnesses, love blessed them with a happiness that was almost fearful.

Their work, too,—for they squabbled desperately over it at times—furnished a ready ground wire to conduct off the too high tension of living so closely and solely with each other. That amazing book, which had been written by a method that had nothing but originality to commend it, had come along so surprisingly that Wardwell, always a grudging critic of his own work, had walked around in violent alternations of feeling. At one moment he was confident that the work was fine, and ten minutes later he would be attacked by a sickening distrust that, after all, they must be “kidding themselves.”

Augusta's faith had never wavered. She knew that the book was at all times as good as Jimmie's best, and she wanted nothing more than that. Measured in written words, her own part in it was not great. But Wardwell knew that, from the moment she had come into it, the soul of the book was Augusta's own spirit in it.

When it was finished and Jimmie had waded down through breast-deep January drifts to the railroad station to mail the manuscript, and had come back with empty hands, Augusta sat down and cried bitterly. She had gotten to so love the book that, toward the end,

every physical touch that she gave it was a caress. And now that it was gone it seemed almost as though a little fledgling boy of theirs had been driven out into a cold, blustering world to make his way alone.

But Jimmie was crafty in waiting, and wise in ways to disappoint disappointment.

"Don't let them see that we're anxious, darling," he counselled warily. "Let's just keep saying that we don't care a rap, and that we expect it to be rejected anyway. Then maybe it'll get by." He had all of an Ethiopian's superstition that the little gods of mischief were always watching around to snatch away the thing on which one set his heart too openly.

"We'll get right to work on something else," he said, holding Augusta curled up in his lap and petting her, "and pretend that we've forgotten all about it." He remembered grim, waiting days in the past when he had listened to the postman's whistle and had not dared to go down like a man to see what the mail had brought him, but had peeped shame-faced down the stairs at the hall table where the letters were piled, always expecting to see the thick neat packet of manuscript that meant another hope rejected.

Now it was all different, for he had another to think of. And his anxiety was not for the outcome itself so much as it was to save Augusta from the bitterness of a first crushing disappointment. The best that they could expect—he tried to tell her—was that the book might be considered, and, perhaps, if they could make the changes that the publisher would be sure to want, might be finally accepted. But, in any case, it would be at least a year before the book would bring them anything, either advertising or reputation or money, or anything else.

In the very first place they must begin to write some things that might be quickly turned into money. They

must do some short stories at once. He had some, Jimmie said, which had been bumping around in his head all the time while he had been busy with the book. Now he would round them up and put them to work. They must make some money right away.

If Augusta wondered at his sudden anxiety about money, she did not ask questions. She was not incurious, but she never pried. She knew that he was sensitive about money, and that he was becoming more so. But she did not know of any new reason for his hurry to make money. She had known vaguely that he must have borrowed money that time when he had bought Donahue back for her, but she knew that he would not wish to be questioned on the matter, and she had refrained from speculating on it.

Wardwell was beginning to know that, in that time, he had done something that in the nature of things was altogether wrong. He did not know just why it was so very wrong. But he knew that it was beginning to bother him a great deal. And, in a man's foolish way of only seeing one thing, he believed that if he could only get money now it would set the whole thing right.

They had gone to work then, gravely pretending to have forgotten all about the ship that had gone to sea. And, to an extent, they did forget it. For Jimmie had some very good ideas for short stories and he fell to work upon them with an energy that surprised himself. And Augusta at first pecking diffidently at the typewriter, and then striking boldly for herself into untried waters, found herself at the end of three days almost hopelessly bewildered and drifting. Her story, which had seemed so easy and simple in the starting, would not go forward. And for three days more she sat futilely writing pages which she knew she would presently tear up. Jimmie sat by and at times he grinned sympathetically, but he offered no help, except to threaten to take

Augusta out and roll her in the snow if she persisted in sitting too long and closely at the typewriter. Then, when she was almost ready to cry in despair, the story began somehow to move, and almost before she knew what was happening it ran out to a triumphant conclusion that she had hardly dreamed of.

It was a beautiful little story, wind bitten, sun sweet, like Augusta's own self. And Jimmie knew that it was true work. Though she begged him to re-write it for her as he had done with what she had composed for the book, Jimmie would not touch it. He showed her a few places where her lack of training to the trade had left defects in construction. And when she had copied in her own corrections he took the story and addressed it and carried it proudly down to the railroad station.

After that their waiting and anxiety was all for the fate of Augusta's little story. And when, a full week before there was any reasonable hope for an answer from it, Wardwell went down to the station and actually brought home an acceptance and a check for it, they forgot everything and danced and capered about the fire in Indian glee.

"I shall now," said Jimmie comfortably, sitting down as the excitement subsided a little, "devote myself to the instruction of an appreciative future generation. I'll write for posterity, while my wife writes for bread and bacon."

But Augusta was not there to hear. She had taken the check and run out through the snow, to show it to Donahue.

From that time on through the winter Jimmie's weekly journeyings down to the station were an event. They had agreed to avoid the use of Jethniah's much nearer post office, not because they had anything to conceal from their old friend but because they did not wish to be discussed by the inevitable winter gossips

who sat on Jethniah's nail kegs and pilfered his soda crackers, so they had mail only once in the week. And every week now there was something to be hoped for, some manuscript to be heard from which they both said aloud would probably come back rejected, but which in their secret hearts they both thought "might stick," as Jimmie sometimes diffidently phrased it. For Augusta had fallen into Jimmie's way of never voicing the highest hope, lest a jealous power should hear and blast it. And they were for all the world like a pair of old fashioned New England parents who would never dare boast about their offspring, for that would mean that the children would surely come to some bad end.

They were so busy, and so happy in the varying ups and downs of hopes, disappointments and realizations, that when the letter came saying that the publishers were pleased with Wardwell's book and that, if agreeable to him, they would forward him a contract for its publication on the usual royalty basis, it hardly caused any more than the usual weekly excitement. It did not, in fact, reach up to half the importance of Augusta's first little check.

Wardwell was not disappointed, for he had not expected any other proposal than this one that had been made for the book. But he was not exactly satisfied. He would have much preferred to try to get a cash offer for the manuscript. For he was still sensitive to the thought that Augusta had spent on account of him all the little money that had been left from her mother, and that she was now, even though they had both begun to earn some money, practically penniless. He thought that he could not feel right again until he had been able to put into her hands at least the amount of money which she had had in the beginning. It was a little, unworthy way of looking at the matter, compared

with the unthought, whole-hearted way in which Augusta had done the thing—and Wardwell knew this. But Jimmie was not, in these days, seeing things with his usual clear vision.

There was another matter—a matter that had been hanging over him since the day when he had telegraphed for money to buy back Donahue—which was hanging over him and spoiling his imagination and his insight. However, there was nothing that he could do except to work on as rapidly as he could.

Now that the noisy interruption of the sugaring had passed they turned back happily to the habits of their work—if indeed their ways of doing things could be called habits, for they worked or played or ate, or did none of these things, very much as the spirit of the moment suggested.

They had been obliged to take Mr. Gamblin into their confidence, for the checks which had been coming were of no practical use to them here, and it was necessary to have a banker.

“Checks” said Jethniah, when Jimmie had shown him the first of their earnings and had asked him to deposit them. “I thought all checks had Boynton & Bailey’s name on ’em, and was to pay the farmers for milk.”

“You needn’t cash them now you know, Mr. Gamblin. If you’ll just let them go through your bank down in Tupper, why, you can give us the money any time after they’ve gone through and so you can’t be taking any risk at all.”

“Risk!” Jethniah grumbled. “Who said risk? I wouldn’t know this here Eagle Publishing Coe from Adam’s pet hyena if I met them both face to face, an’ this here Bank of Manhattan may be an ingrowin’ hole in the ground for all I know. But you’ve writ your name on the back of one of these checks and your wife’s writ

hers on t'other. An' that says they're good. So they're good.

"That's me, every time. Just like a post in the mud."

He gave his trousers a premonitory heave, as if to advise them of what was going to happen. And striking down deep into the right fore pocket he pulled forth a good roll of bills and began to count.

"But say?" he queried, in a gentle, wondering tone that invited confidence. "Don't you honestly have to do *any* work at all—just write down things—and have them send you checks?"

"Not another thing," Jimmie asserted stoutly.

"Gosh all Fish 'ooks!" Jethniah exploded admiringly. "Why don't everybody do it!"

"I don't know," said Wardwell solemnly. "I've always wondered."

As the weeks drew on into the opening Spring, Augusta, sensitive always as a poplar leaf, began to feel that from somewhere a crisis was impending upon them. There was no tangible thing that could be a source of apprehension to them. The question of money, which had once been terrible for them, was now happily resolving itself into the simplest incidental of their work. Jimmie, she was at last sure, could for the rest of his life laugh at the threat of the disease which had driven them out upon the road. The Winter, which had indeed been formidable for them, was past; and for the Summer, which would be coming before very long, they would be as comfortable and as nicely situated as they could wish. They were welcome to stay on here. Or, if they were tired of the solitude and the closeness of the life, they knew that they could now easily earn as much as they needed to live nicely in almost any place.

Materially, it was plain, nothing could threaten them. For they were now as independent as it is possible for two people to be on this earth, where the price of

living must always be paid in some kind. Even what is called independent wealth could not have made them more free than they were, because, with that, they would have more things to fear than they now had.

But Augusta well knew that this presentiment, which came treacherously stealing upon her in the dreaming moments when her spirit was wandering alone and unguarded in that border land where dreams and good stories come from, was not warning her against any material happening.

With a prescience as cruel as eye-sight could have been, she knew that this thing would strike at her heart. And, her heart could only be hurt through Jimmie.

Long ago she had foreseen and trembled at this day when love would make a coward of her. And although many times in the year past she had been able to believe that Jimmie loved her truly, the way a man chooses his girl and wants her, and not from any prompting of duty or mere affection, yet the fact remained, unescapable and unanswerable: *they had not started fair.*

She had taken Jimmie at his word, when pity, and probably affection, and a pretty childish attractiveness, had prompted him to ask her to marry him. But, even then, she had known that it was not fair, for, even then, though neither of them would have believed this, she had been a woman while he was an impulsive boy.

It was true that even in that time she had loved him with a love which he would not have believed her capable of even guessing at. But that made no difference. Jimmie had not been free. Nothing that had since passed had altered that fact. And Augusta had cruelly whipped herself into believing, that even if Jimmie had not cared for her in any way, his quick heart and his kindness for her mother and herself would have made him do just what he had done in the circumstances. (She was able to believe this because she knew that she

herself, at that time, would have married the most repulsive man in the world if it had been a necessary condition for getting her mother out of the madhouse.)

All this had lain away covered in her mind through the months of happiness and well being and hopeful, heart-filling work. But it was inevitable, as she had always known, that it would one day come forth and stalk upon her.

The outward signs that the peace of her mind and the safety of her love were being threatened were indeed very slight. Jimmie was restless. Something was troubling him, that much she knew. Once or twice she had felt that he was on the point of speaking out, but the moment had passed and had left her with the dizzy, sinking feeling of a threat suspended.

Sometimes she was able to lull the feeling of foreboding evil by the thought that it was merely the Spring. Everything about them was restless and stirring and shooting forth buds and blades, and all the little rivers of life were running full. It was only to be expected that they themselves, coming out of the close, storm bound life of the Winter, should feel a stirring of unrest, an urge of discontent and energy, towards something new.

Also, she knew that their reading of the war in Europe had been having an unsettling effect upon both of them. In the days of last Summer and Fall, when Jimmie's health was her single thought and when he himself was still subject to recurrent days of feverishness during which the doings of the world lost their interest for him, the first news of the world's tragedy had come dribbling to them through occasional old newspapers borrowed from Mr. Gamblin's store, and it had hardly aroused in them anything more than a puzzled and only half believing wonder. Belgium was mutilated—But Jimmie's temperature must be watched.

Later, however, when the shadow was definitely lifted from Wardwell's life, they began to follow the war with an avidity that was proportional to their detachment from the diversions and worries which took up the thoughts of other people more normally situated. They subscribed for a New York daily paper, and when Jimmie came home from the station with a week's papers in a bundle they sat down and devoured them eagerly.

Augusta, all pity and eager partisanship for the innocent and for the right, was disappointed in Jimmie. He, being half boy and whole writing man, thought only of the noise and the whole whaling wonder of the thing, and she wondered that he could take it all so impartially. But now there came a May day when Jimmie came home with his bundle of mail and tramped heavily into the room, without speaking.

He walked over to where she sat at the typewriter. Before her, over the machine, he spread a paper and laid his hand on the broad headlines. They told of the Lusitania horror.

After a little he leaned over her shoulder, as she read in silence, and pointed down a column of the known dead to the name of a man—a writing man—whom he had loved.

He walked slowly over to the table in the corner and dropped the mail quietly. Augusta stole a look at him as he stood there, leaning over slightly, brooding, his big hands, rough and red from work and wind, knuckled down hard on the bare table.

She was struck by a sense of something missing. The boyishness was gone from Jimmie's face. And, with a little shiver, she knew that she would never see it again. Her playboy had vanished. She was looking at a man who had hardened into a mold within the hour.

She had never seen Jimmie angry, for he had prac-

tically no temper. And he was not angry now, in any ordinary sense of the word. His face was no study. It was plain, and ugly with a single emotion. The emotion was as plain, and as old, as blood—revenge.

But Augusta knew that it was not the restlessness of Spring that threatened her. And she knew that not even the sullen restiveness of a call of blood could hurt in the way that she was going to be hurt.

She was a woman. And she knew that only through a woman could she be wounded to her heart's depth. That strange prescience, that borderland insight which had come to her in other times, and had sometimes been kind to her and sometimes cruel, had lately been turning up pictures to her mind. And although she had not admitted them to her ordinary, self-controlled consciousness, yet fragments of them always remained, and in spite of her will to dissolve them she found them becoming more and more clearly parts of a composite picture of a woman—the tall, black woman whom she had seen that day when the Irish gypsy girl had forced the cards into her hands.

Now this was all in spite of her will. Her good sense, as she called it, fought these things down again and again. She would not let herself be morbid. And yet, all the time, her soul was summoning courage against the blow. When she should know that Jimmie wanted to go from her, she must make him free. That had been in the bond from the beginning. She herself had put it in the vow of her marriage.

On a morning just beyond the middle of May when the plum trees were all in white blossom, which, as all the world knows, is the one elect time for brook fishing, Jimmie went fishing.

Augusta stayed at home with the avowed, and honest, intention of fixing a dress. Their clothes had stood the rough wear remarkably well. But, as good

clothes will do, now that they were beginning to go they seemed to give out everywhere at once.

But Augusta never took any pleasure in fixing her own clothes. So by the time she had taken down her good dress and looked it over, and had poked tentatively at several slightly worn places in it, she decided that it was Jimmie's wardrobe that really needed attention.

His one fair coat was not at all what it should be. And she knew there was a rip under the right armhole. She must do that first. She would give it a thorough beating and cleaning and let it hang a while in the sweetening sun. The first thing was to clean out the pockets and turn them wrong side out. He always carried such truck in his pockets! Cigarette papers, loose matches—it was a miracle that he didn't burn himself up, improvised lead sinkers, stubs of lead pencils, a few loose cartridges, letters from publishers, scraps and pieces that had once been white paper and had had parts of stories written on them. She shucked them all out on the table and stood looking down at them with some of the consternation and wonder with which a young mother looks at the amazing contents of her boy's trouser pockets.

Long afterwards it came to Augusta as one of the bitterest things of all that her blow should have come upon her in what might have been the way of cheap and tawdry melodrama. She might have been a snooping wife going jealously through her husband's pockets.

She stood there a long time staring down at a letter that, of its own power it seemed, stood out apart and separated from all the rest. She did not touch the letter. There was no power in her, nor no wish, to turn a page of it. It had no envelope. And it had, with insensate malice, spread out the whole of its front page to her eye.

It was a love letter, one link of a chain of established correspondence between a woman and Jimmie Wardwell.

After the first, heart-withering look at the page which gave her this complete, all-embracing intelligence, Augusta did not read. She stood staring dumbly, and then, still keeping her eyes helplessly on the page, she began to back, step by step, cowering away from it.

Creeping backward still, she came against the chair on which she had thrown her dress. Her hand went out mechanically and she grasped the dress, just where she had stuck the forgotten needle in it.

The pain of the piercing needle mercifully took her eyes away from that letter. She pulled the needle from where it had stuck in the palm of her hand, and mechanically brought the hurt up to her lips.

Then she looked at the dress. What was it doing there?

Oh yes! She remembered. She was going away. She had always known that she was going away. Now it was the time.

She took the dress and carried it over behind the little curtain of her hammock bed.

When she was ready to go, she sat down at the typewriter and wrote a line in the middle of a clean sheet of paper.

She was not herself, of course; and we do not know just what was passing in her mind. But she wrote:

We may not live together. We shall not die apart.

As she rose from the typewriter she looked again, because she could not help it, at the letter, and in the lower part of the page that lay open before her she saw clearly the words "your Jean."

She did not need these words to tell her what she already knew, that the letter was from the woman with whom Jimmie had promised to have nothing to

do. For she had already seen, in the first moment, a flash of the woman's dark, handsome, discontented face.

But the written words, the written claim, roused in her a swelling, choking anger.

She would not go away! She would stay and *fight* that women to the death for her love!

Yet all the time she knew that she would go. It was inevitable, as her heart had always somehow told her that this hour would inevitably come.

Except for his broken promise—That was unanswerable—she had no heart to blame Jimmie. She would not go in anger. In her heart she had sworn that, if this day should come, she would free him completely, and without bitterness.

She was going.

Her love was spoiled, tarnished; another had touched it. She could never again have the glory of it. Dear heart of life, how beautiful it had been! And she must go, lest in her weakness she should grovel and bring that one beautiful thing of life down into dust with her.

As she passed the stable, Donahue whinnied lovingly at the sound of her step. But she dared not stop. For she knew that if she stopped now, and broke down and cried with her pet and friend, the miserable end would be that she would run to where Jimmie was and throw herself on her knees to him and beg weakly for his love. And—the shame of it!—he would talk, and talk, and talk, and in the end she would live on with him, to hate herself and him.

So her eyes were dry and her little shoulders bravely set as she trudged on down through the fringe of trees and into the brook path.

She did not know the cross-cuts by which Jimmie went to the station every week—Oh yes, Jimmie went to the station every week!—but she knew the direc-

tion fairly well. She would find it. She did not know how many trains there were in the day, but she was quite sure that there would be one before she could be missed and overtaken. Jimmie had gone fishing for the day.

Now this last thing one would rather not tell. Studied design could not have found anything quite so cruel to have done to her. It is, in fact, left for accident and blind, silly coincidence to furnish the most terrible thrusts of life. When Augusta came, still dry-eyed and hurrying, down the dusty road to the little station, she saw a man going away from the station and starting across the fields. He did not see her.

It was Jimmie. He had not gone fishing.

IX

"Charles of Burgundy Comes, Thirteen Fifty-Eight—"

"He's a boob if he comes here!"

"That don't mean comes, you nut," some scholar elucidated. "*Comes* means Duke. Charles, Duke of Burgundy. He built the bridge."

"Wish t'ell he'd built it straight east and west." Don Mallet threw down the thin stone tablet in disgust. It had landed a moment before in the pit of his stomach. A German shell exploding a little distance on the other side of the bridge coping had gently lobbed the stone plate out of the wall where it had rested four and a half centuries and shied it playfully at Mallet where he sat on the ground.

When Charles of Burgundy had his name cut in that stone tablet and had it set in the bridge he did not foresee Mallet, nor the need of a bridge running east and west.

But Mallet was here, and fifteen others, all heartily approving his wish for a slight change in the alignment of the bridge, all except a German machine gunner and an American corporal who lay head to head close under the coping of the wall, with the body of a "pup" tent stretched impartially over their heads, and who did not care.

This party, with a lieutenant in command, had crossed the river to the north side before dawn. Behind them from the hills beyond the river the American artillery, as fast as it could come up to the river brow, was getting to work, firing high above this party and

a score of other parties that had crossed the river in the dark under orders to find cover and stay.

In the dark they had stumbled into a machine gun position on this little bridge over the dry bed of a creek. They had gone over the five-foot coping on their bellies, their rifles with bayonets fixed swinging free in their hands.

Of the five Germans who had been on the bridge only the man now lying here unconscious had seen the dawn come down the valley a few minutes later. For, as Patsy Murtha had remarked:

"That Kamerad stuff's all right when you can see what their hands are doin'. But, in the dark—!"

With the coming of the light five of the men had put on the tunics and helmets of those who had lately held the place and had stood about the guns, to show enemy watchers on the slopes and in the gullies to the north that things were quite as they should be, while the remainder of the men hid themselves under the coping of the bridge.

But the ruse did not avail them long. And this was why Don Mallet was dissatisfied with the direction of the bridge. If it had run more nearly east and west they would have been invisible from a certain wooded gully that cut down through the hill beyond the bridge and which, as happened, lay directly in line with the bridge.

The full light had revealed the men in American uniforms strung along under the coping of the bridge. What the German machine gunners in the gully thought is not pertinent. A driving blast of wind swept across the bridge propelled by a rain of machine gun bullets which cleaned the bridge as swiftly as if a giant broom were sweeping ants off it.

The five men on the bridge came tumbling over the coping rolling the machine guns with them and

falling in grunting heaps among their friends. It seemed that they were quite miraculously unscathed from the blast which had driven them from the bridge. For when they had gotten to sitting postures, the five, in prompt concert, ripped off the German jackets, wadded them into the helmets and shied the whole over the bank down into the dry bed of the creek below the bridge. That this action was not merely a matter of sentiment was proven by the fact that the five immediately pulled off their own clean American shirts and began to shake and search them severely. These men had not now for weeks lived in an established trench or dugout. From away beyond the Ourcq to here, above the Vesle, they had come foot by foot, always in the open, drifting and seeping, drifting and seeping, in and out among the rear lines of a foe who always retreated yet who always kicked back murderously. Sometimes they had fought as part of a battalion, creeping in a long thin Indian file around a nest of machine guns, dragging themselves prone through the grass or the standing grain, until the line was near enough to spring yelling upon the surrounded foe. They had fought and drifted, singly, in squads, going forward sometimes in dozens, dribbling back through in twos and threes. They had learned to sleep behind a fallen tree trunk with machine gun bullets sifting above their noses. But for three blessed weeks they had lived in the open, crossing running water every day—and they were body clean! The five men were at that moment more afraid of German lice than they were of the wind of death that was driving over their heads. All values are, of course, relative.

Sergeant Jimmie Wardwell, his body well hidden by the deep foliage of the tree in which he had taken his post, poked a long-nosed rifle out across a limb. It was a hunting rifle that he had borrowed one day

two years ago from a Canadian named Bray Stewart, a long-limbed fellow with a friendly grin, a gentle gray eye, and an unconquerable obsession that this war was a deer hunt. Stewart was irrevocably convinced that if "they" really wanted to win the war they had only to put enough North Ontario farmer boys up in convenient trees and pot all the Germans on earth, up to five hundred yards. He had a scheme for making salt licks in No Man's Land.

But Stewart, Jock as they called him—all Stewarts are called Jock, had been sent into the mud flats of the upper Lys, where there were no trees, and where the best possible shelter was a ditch two thirds full of water. And Jock, on the very day when in mere discouragement he had lent the long hunting rifle to Wardwell—for what conceivable purpose the rifle had either been borrowed or lent will never be known—Jock that day inhaled some of the first poison gas which the progressive Hun had used and Jock had lain face down in his ditch and drowned.

Wardwell had taken this as a personal and gratuitous injury. He had not known Jock very much, for Wardwell had just come over from a training camp in England and been filtered into Jock's company, while Stewart had come over with the Canadian regiment almost in the beginning. Jock was a veteran soldier of nineteen, while Jimmie was green and a Yank to boot. But Wardwell had listened respectfully to Jock's lies about the hunting in the hills far up on the road to Cobalt, where they saw snow ten months of every year. And Jimmie had lied moderately and with good judgment about the hunting in his own hills. They had respected each other.

Since then Wardwell had kept the rifle by him, in violation of the Articles of War, in more or less secret defiance of barrack sergeants, against the expressed

wishes of high and low command, and to the death of many individual Germans who never saw him.

A tall German under officer strutted out from the woody shelter of the gully between the hills and stood boldly out on the slope. Evidently he thought that he was out of effective range and he saw that his own guns were not reaching the men strung under the coping of the bridge. He must get a gun out on the slope here where it could sweep the Americans where they lay. His problem was as plain to his intended victims as it was to himself. The boys were already swinging their captured machine guns into line.

"Hold your cannon, till you need them," said the lieutenant, speaking quietly from where he lay out in the grass half way between the men and Wardwell's tree. "If Heine'll just hold that pose for another couple of seconds, Wardwell will—"

Wardwell did. Jock's long rifle grunted once. The German put his hand up sharply to his throat, turned half around, then gave a funny little attempt at a jump sidewise, as though something had suddenly risen in the path before him, and slid bumping down into the grass.

Two German privates came out of the cover and stood over the body of the fallen man. Wardwell held his hand, while his companions below waited, understanding. If these two had come out risking their lives to drag a wounded officer to shelter he would not shoot.

One of the men leaned down examining the prone figure in the grass. He straightened up almost immediately and made a deliberate kick at the body. That officer was dead.

Not one man of those watching by the bridge offered a word of comment. They had been daily, hourly, learning strange things about this enemy as they

fought and followed him. But they had come to no conclusions except the one safe one that Wardwell presently punctuated.

The man who had taken a kick at the dead man now stood with his legs straddled wide apart looking down at the bridge. He did not seem to expect any danger, and since Wardwell was using smokeless powder and there was plainly no firing from the men who could be seen it is quite possible that the German thought the officer had been killed by a stray bullet from his own side. When Wardwell fired again it seemed to the boys in their eagerness that they could almost follow the bullet in its course.

They could, in fact, only see that the man dropped vertically like a stone dropping, but some one said excitedly:

"Eight hundred feet and over, and a clean drill between the eyes! that aint luck, that's hate."

"You've got good eyes if you can see all that," drawled a Yankee boy from northern New York. "But he does seem to have a kind of a prejudice against the Beerheads, at that."

"He aint like us here," explained a philosopher from Glens Falls. "We come here to fight 'cause the fightin's good here. But this Wardwell gent, he's seen too much. He aint fightin' Germans now. He's executin' them. He uses a rifle 'cause he can't get to 'em with a rope."

The remaining German had started running for the shelter of the ravine, but Wardwell's chance shot at the moving target caught him in the hip and he tumbled headlong down out of sight.

Wardwell had come far since a day long ago upon the hills above the lake when he had drawn what he thought was a perfect sight on a chipmunk's eyes at fifty feet and had ruined a perfectly good sap bucket which hung

forgotten a good six feet below where the chipmunk had been.

Developments soon showed what the officer had had in mind when he came out on the slope of the hill. Sand bags and stones began flying up out of the ravine until they formed a respectable pile on the edge of the hill. Behind these came loose dirt hastily shovelled over and beginning to mark the line of a trench. The Germans were burrowing into the side of the hill. They would quickly run a shallow trench out along the slope of the hill to a point fifty feet or so in the open, from which point, when they had dragged a heavy machine gun to it, they could sweep the Americans from where they lay under the wall of the little bridge.

The boys quickly trained the captured guns upon the moving line of dirt where it seemed as though a big mole was nosing his way along the face of the hill. But the elevation was sharply against them, and the lieutenant saw that they were hitting nothing for there was no mark above the dirt.

"Save your ammunition," he commanded, "and cover up the guns. They might be handy if we had to come back this way in a hurry.

"Put the two wounded men under the bridge and take cover in the creek bed."

The two men were quickly eased down into the dry water course under the bridge and left as comfortable as was possible, while the lieutenant called up to Wardwell:

"We'll have to depend on you for a lookout, Wardwell. They might try to rush the creek from above or below. Though I don't think the outfit across there is anxious to rush anything this way. Stay where you are while you can. But if you think they've spotted you, make your rush for the creek bed. Don't stay if it should become—useless."

“Right, Sir,” said Wardwell, smiling to himself among the leaves. He knew that the young officer had started to say: “Don’t stay if it should become too hot for you.” But he was getting used to the way they thought of him and spoke to him. It had started with the boys. They were Irish descent, most of these with whom he had been through these weeks, and, what was worse, they had been brigaded in with an old Irish regiment in the British army early in the summer. What their own ready working imagination had not taught them, about war and its superstitions and its queer and unreadable chances, the Irish had supplied to them. One thing which the Irish had taught them came under the category ‘important, if true.’ It was founded on the well known fact that a man born to be hanged will never be drowned. Every man, it appeared, had a certain number fixed to him by fate. It represented the number of chances which were his against death, the number of times that he might face death front to front and escape. Some men had only a few chances, and a man might lose out on even the first of his chances. Others had many. But every time a man went through a desperate action he used one of his chances of escape. But there were certain men who had used up all of their chances, who had reached the very last number. And then, in this their last moment, by some queer stumble of fate, they had been missed. After that they were not merely safe, they were isolated. Death fled from them. They could hunt death, and some of them did—so the Irish said, but they could not achieve it from human hands.

Wardwell, it was whispered among the boys with wise nodding of heads, Wardwell was one of these. And they counted the tale of the numbered chances that he had used, until he had, somehow, missed the last unfailling one.

After that, they said, he had no chance. And they told of places where he had put himself in the path of death, of how men had died in front of him and behind him, how he had been shot through so many times that now he hardly bled when wounded. This last was untrue, of course. Many things that they told were over drawn, as they would be. Most of the tales were inaccurate. And, again as would happen, many of the things were only half told.

So Wardwell understood, and smiled when he felt his officer hesitate about naming the word danger to him.

He was partly Irish himself, and he knew that some of the times when he had escaped death it had been hardly short of miraculous. Also he knew that there were other men in the armies who like himself had lived through almost unbelievable numbers of chances and that these were marked men who did not seem to be able to die in battle.

For himself, however, he had no need of the theory of chances which explained these things to the men. He knew.

When the time should come, he would get his wound. And the wound would bring death. But before death could come he would see Augusta.

It was all simple, and as it had been ordained from the beginning.

The trench along the face of the hill was all but complete now, and at the end of it there grew a considerable rounded pile of sand bags. There they were going to set the gun. He saw signs of a movement along through the trench, and knew that they were dragging a heavy machine gun out to its place. A head and part of a shoulder came up momentarily above the line of dirt. Wardwell had his sight upon it but he did not try the difficult shot. He must give them time to get busy with the gun, and to grow careless.

No, there was nothing left to chance, or to any number of chances. Everything that had happened, and that was happening and going to happen, moved into place as the result of something that had gone before, as inevitably as one pebble is moved by the pressure of another pebble.

In his ignorance—it is only in ignorance that the fatal things are done, malice is not cunning enough—he had committed the one unforgivable sin. He had taken money from one woman to give to another.

He had not known at the time that it was the unpardonable sin. He had not, as he remembered it now, thought of anything except that he could not stand Augusta's grief for the loss of her horse. To get her pet back for her at that time he would have taken money from anybody.

It was true enough that the other woman had owed him the money in an entirely business-like way. He had loaned her the money at a time when she needed it.

Afterwards she had married a wealthy man. Several times when they had met she had laughingly tried to pay him back his loan, but he had always talked her around the matter, and later he had dropped out of her sight into the seclusion of Rose Wilding's house to make his fight for his book and a reputation.

That morning when he had seen Augusta grieving in the empty stable, and after he had talked with Jethniah, he had gone down to the station and sent the telegram to the woman saying simply that he needed the money and asking for it.

He had had no misgiving that he was doing anything that would ever hurt Augusta. He had thought no more of the matter than if he had been asking any man for the return of a loan at need.

The trouble was that the woman was discontented in marriage—as she would have been discontented in

singleness, or discontented in jail, or discontented in what was her idea of heaven. She was looking for diversion, and her discontent took the form of imagining herself to be sadly and irretrievably in love with Wardwell. (If she had been obliged to live two weeks in a cabin with him she would have come to the point of murdering him.)

Not long after he had sent the telegram and received his money Jimmie had begun to be troubled with a sharp premonition of something wrong. Something was brewing up for him somewhere. He was quick to understand that the one contact which he had established with the world without was probably the source of his worry. He mooned around for a day or so, waiting for something to drop, as he put it to himself. Then he went fearfully down to the station.

There were six letters waiting for him.

He read the last first. It seemed that the woman had somehow learned that Wardwell had gone away sick. From the last of the letters he gathered that she had pictured him to herself as lying penniless and alone, and at the point of death, somewhere in the woods, and that she was about to fly to him. She was capable of doing it, he knew.

With the choking, hopeless feeling of a man being drowned, he wondered if she had already started. In his panic he telegraphed:

Do not come. Am leaving here.

No sooner was the wire gone than he repented the last words of it. Why had he lied? He should not have lied, for it would only lead to other lies. The woman was one to revel in mysteries, and his evading her now would merely determine her to come and search him out. He was not going away from here, and he should not have lied to say so. Now he would have to write, at once, and take back the lie.

Then and there he borrowed paper and wrote. He told her, circumstantially, that he was in perfect health. He explained that he and his wife—the woman evidently had not thought of the possibility of his being married—were living away up here in the woods in order that they might be able to go on with their writing without interruptions. He apologized abjectly for having annoyed her. He hoped that she would remember that only a temporary and acute crisis had made him trouble her, and at the same time he hoped that she would forget the whole matter.

The letter was so unlike his usual clear handed methods that he felt sure the lady would either think him deranged or that she would disbelieve the whole of it. But he sent the letter. At any rate he must try to keep her from coming here.

Then he started home to Augusta, dragging with him a weight of hang-dog misery that increased at every step.

Never had Augusta's sweetness and the dear simple beauty of her faith in him been so precious to him as in those minutes. He hated the other woman unreasoningly, viciously; and yet more he hated himself, because, somehow, he seemed to have thrown a slur upon Augusta. That day, when her heart was high and sweet with its sacrifice for him, he had forced her, in some shameful way it seemed, to take something—money in fact—which he had taken from another woman.

He knew, even in that walk home, that he had done a fatal thing. And the anxieties and the nightmares of the winter that followed came upon him inexorably and without surprise.

In alternate letters, and often alternately in the same letter, the other woman upbraided him for having deceived her, in being married, and being well, and on the other hand vowed that she did not believe a word of

what he told her but was sure that he was there sick and alone and that she must come to see.

Through all that winter and into the spring he lived under the constant dread that the woman might come, and he was obliged to answer every letter, profusely and carefully, lest something which he omitted to answer might give her the impulse that would bring her flying to find him. That the whole business was melodramatic, and entirely foolish, did not lighten the matter in the least. And at all times he was convinced with a miserable dull certainty that all he did was useless. Augusta would inevitably come to know, anyhow. He had never expected to be able to hide anything from her. He had sworn that he never would have anything to hide from her. He was certain that she would come to know of this, and in the most shameful and pitiless way. He had no hope that it would be otherwise.

Even now, as he watched the German gun being poked into its place above the line of the dirt on the far hillside, he shuddered at the humiliation and the ignominy of that winter. Augusta had known that there was something wrong. She had, of course, seen it in his eyes and sensed it in the air about him, from the very beginning. But he had never been able to tell her. He knew Augusta's peculiar jealousy. It was not the usual property-holding interest by which the average woman clings to her rights in a man, because she is afraid of the consequences of letting him slip away from her.

Augusta was in this, as in so many things, different from any woman whom Wardwell had ever known or imagined. Like all people that live a great deal within themselves, the things that were her own, even the little things, had a sacred and a touching value to Augusta. If a thing was not entirely her own she did not care for it at all. She wanted nothing near her that she had to share in any way with another person. Wardwell

remembered that she had once given away her best coat because another girl had put it on herself just for a moment to see how she would look in it. And as for the loaf of her love, so far from being able to think of sharing it with anyone, he knew that the thought that another had even looked at it would be enough to spoil it for Augusta.

And he, with this full knowledge of her fiercely proud little heart, had brought another woman in to despoil the sacred shrine of Augusta's love. He knew that she had thanked him for getting her pet back for her as the dearest thing he had ever done for her. And now when she should come to know the truth—as she would—it would embitter her to know that she owed it to another woman.

As the letters continued to come and the worry and humiliation of keeping up what seemed like an intrigue grew upon him he moodily wished that Augusta might learn the truth.

He could not tell her, for the very fact that must be his excuse, that he had done what he did for the love of her, would be the very reason why Augusta would resent his going to another woman. Explanations were always useless to Augusta. She cared not at all for the details. She would understand instantly, he thought, and understand more justly than he could tell her. But she would be mortally hurt.

It did not occur to him that Augusta would be just like every other woman. He never thought that Augusta in the supreme test when her love was threatened, would lose her almost inspired insight and go blind to everything except the one condemning fact—that he was corresponding secretly with another woman.

When the end came, when he came home that day to learn that Augusta had left him, and to read her note with its stark and yet prophetic finality, he was

stunned by this thing which he had expected least of all.

The first emotion that he remembered was a furious anger with Augusta. It seemed that she had read but a part of one of the letters and had immediately jumped to the worst of conclusions. He was angry with Augusta, he remembered now, not because she had gone, but because she had allowed herself to be stupid.

How could she have misunderstood? Why should she have misjudged him so? She must have been deliberately blind, for Augusta had not only an unerring instinct for truth she had also a keenness of judgment such as he had hardly ever seen in man or woman.

But that was all very, very long ago, and he scarcely remembered now the boyish rage in which he had raved and had torn the hated letters and stamped them into the floor of the cabin.

He had chased feverishly to New York after her, and he had walked the city, without a starting point and without direction, looking for her, as he and she together had once walked the streets looking for Rose Wilding. Then, when at last he had become convinced that it was useless, that he would never find Augusta until the time that she should choose, he had gone back to the lake, to the Hills of Desire, to wait for her.

He found Donahue browsing contentedly among the trees much as he had left him, and a world mockingly unchanged.

Of course, he could not stay there. The haunting, whispering sweetness of Augusta's presence was there at every turn of his eyes, in the breath of every breeze that brushed his cheek, in the song of every bird that piped. There memories choked him, of the nights when she had fought the fever with him, of days when their hearts had danced together in the joy of work. There he had learned why the human race continues to wish

to live—he had learned to know a sweet woman's heart.

On the morning of the fourth day he went down to the station and bought a ticket for Montreal. The station agent-postmistress told him with a simper that there were letters for him.

"Will you please keep them," Wardwell requested politely, "until I call on my way back. I—I might lose them."

The next day he was a member of a Canadian infantry regiment, on his way to an assembling camp.

Through two years he had lived and fought, as other men lived and fought. He had lain sick and had thirsted and despaired, as other men did; and he had seen how other men died. About the last matter he was not surprised, except at the unwinking simplicity of it.

A man stood beside you and asked for a chew of tobacco. The next time you looked at him he was a corpse, to be buried at once—if there was time. A man ran shouting by your side, and passed you, perhaps, and when you caught up with him he was dead. And they went out so untragically true to their ruling habit and disposition. A talkative man died talking. A quiet man turned his head from you and died his own way.

They had been sickening years, those two years when the claws of the Beast were at the throat of the world. And there had been many times when Wardwell, in the spirit weariness which every good man felt sooner or later, would have been willing to lie down and ask for death, saying that he had done his share. But death had not come for him, and his mind had turned definitely back and rested with conviction on the sentence which Augusta had written for him. They were not to have this life together, but he would not go from here until he had seen her.

The sense of injury and misunderstanding which he had at first nursed had drifted away. Neither did he feel any of the self blame with which he had loaded himself in the beginning. Augusta had not done this thing to them. Neither had his foolish doing effected it. Destiny working with its dull tool, chance, was fashioning out their lives. He did not understand. But it seemed that Augusta understood. So, then, he should not go until he heard her voice calling him.

Then there had come the long looked for call of his own country. He had gone gladly back across the ocean and they had at once given him work in the training of student officers. He gave no thought to the commission which might have been his for the asking. He was not looking for the high adventure of war as these boys and men strained toward it. He was heartily sick of war and all that went with it. He had come back to help raise the posse which would put the ramping Beast in pound. When that should be done, and he knew that it would be done quickly and properly, his work would be finished. But first he would see Augusta.

He had submitted to his loss of Augusta much as a maimed man submits to the loss of a member. He could undoubtedly live on without Augusta. But it is years before a man, who has, for instance, lost a right arm, can remember that the arm is no longer there. He was forever turning to her mentally, and in every crowded street he saw the sweet girlish figure of Augusta just slipping from sight away from him. He had submitted passively to the decree of fate, or whatever it was that had taken her from him, but the living delight of her presence never left him. It was not memory, nor, in any sense, imagination. It was a fact. In those wonderful months which they had had together, Augusta had not merely lived with him. She had so lived herself into

his life that she had become an indefinable, but vital, part of the being that was called Jimmy Wardwell. Without her this Wardwell did not exist.

It was out of this feeling of Augusta's persisting presence with him that there grew up in him a conviction.

Sometimes it seemed mere impudence. Again it seemed entirely reasonable—reasonable and possible only, of course, in connection with Augusta.

He remembered the night when he had lain out alone in a shell hole at Messines. He was wounded in the chest and there was no hope of help coming to him. He could feel the life running out of him, as one after another of the conscious and unconscious grips of life slipped away from him. He was dying, so it was plain. But even as he was coming to that point where he finally surrendered consciousness, he was aware of a force of life within him which was not being dimmed. That part of him which he had come to think of as being of Augusta, that much of him was still living and untouched by death. It was not that he dreamed Augusta there with him. Nor did his groping senses conjure up for him a vision of her. She was there, in him, a living part of of him, which did not and would not die.

From that night he had known that he would not die so long as Augusta lived.

But his thought sometimes went further than this. At the oddest moments, often when hands and body and brain were busiest with the surface of things, more than once when he was actually fighting for his life, there had come to him a flash of something—he did not know whether it was of foreknowledge or of crazy presumption. But it came to him.

Might it not be that Augusta and he were actually coming to the adventure of death together—to *survive* it!—to hold to each other *beyond* it!

If he had believed that the thought was his own, he would have given it no heed. But he was sure that it was not his own. Augusta had given it to him. Of that much he was sure. And in that much he did not reject it.

For himself, out of his own experiences, he had seen the chemistry of death setting to work upon the cooling bodies of men in so many ways, in such varied circumstances, and yet always with such unfailing method and matter-of-factness, that he had never seen any reason to believe in the survival of anything beyond it.

Nevertheless, Augusta had given him the thought.

In the days which he had spent in New York he had looked every moment for Augusta. But when he had stood one day upon the Avenue and had scanned the marching of five thousand girl nurses who were preparing for their work in the train of war, and had not seen Augusta among them, he was convinced that she was not in the country. He was right, for Augusta was already in France.

Since he had come back now to what he felt was the business of concluding the war, he was sure that Augusta was nearer to him than she had been since that day when she left him in the hills. Day and night, whether in fighting or in dead sleep, he could feel her presence with him.

Sometimes she was as poignantly real to him, and as reassuring, as on the long-ago nights in the wagon and in the sugar hut when he used to wake up and listen for her breathing. But there was no illusion in this feeling of her nearness. He knew that Augusta was not really there with him. She was, he had no doubt, though he had not so much as heard her name mentioned, behind these lines somewhere doing the work that came to her. Yet there were times when his head would go up, one ear cocked up in the old way, and

a quick little grin would run across his face, as though he had just thought of something to tell her that would make her laugh.

In the last three weeks Jimmy's feeling that Augusta was living in his life, in every moment of the day's work, had been growing so strong that he knew it could not go on. The end must be near. He would soon see Augusta. He began to look for it hourly.

It was peculiar that he now no longer thought of the original cause of his losing Augusta. War and life had ground all that away. He knew that he would find Augusta looking only to the future. They would keep only the memory of those months of dear love that they had lived together. Their work which they had loved with their souls, the dreams which they had had together, even these things were of the past, and done with.

Wardwell knew that, left to himself, his mind would have thought only of going back—when this was over—and, with Augusta, trying to rebuild and live in the home of dreams that had been their house of love in the Hills of Desire. But Augusta never went back. She was too vital. She was too much like life itself.

If he was to have Augusta, to be with her, he must go on.

He was coming swift to the Great Adventure. He could feel the pulse of his being rising to it.

He did not fear, for he believed that now Augusta wanted him. And if her eyes saw a light through the dropping darkness, then it was a true light. He had only to stumble after.

So he smiled contentedly at the young officer's hesitation in speaking to him of danger, and at the foolish theories of the men regarding his life.

Augusta had always had her will.

Then he happened to remember—for the first time

in many months—that book which had once seemed more to him than life or death. In New York the publishers had told him that it had done well, considering war times and all other things it had done very well. The royalties, they said, they were still holding, because up to that time they had not been able to locate Augusta, to whom he had assigned the ownership of the book three years ago. He had merely told them to keep on looking for her.

Still smiling, he wished that he and Augusta might have just one good picnic on those spoiling royalties.

From behind the little mound of dirt on the hillside the machine gun was dripping a line of bullets along the wall where the Americans had been. There was nobody there, but the German gunner was not yet convinced of that. A gentle, steady breeze was coming down from the slope, clearing the light smoke from the machine gun nests and rolling it slowly down toward the dry creek bed and the bridge. Wardwell thus had a perfect view of the ravine.

But the enemy was cautious. Not a head nor even a hand showed above the line of dirt along the face of the hill. Wardwell searched the ravine itself. A bush in the midst of the dark green centre of the ravine seemed to be moving about grotesquely. Wardwell, over his sights, watched it sharply, until his eyes and his imagination working together resolved it into its component parts. It was a man with green branches tied all about him, and he was tugging a heavy machine gun into a new position.

The effect of his shot gave Wardwell a thorough surprise. Not only did the man with the branches tied about him disappear, but what had seemed to be an almost solid hedge of green shrubs across the mouth of the ravine fell away instantly, revealing some bare rocks and two guns. Wardwell mentally rubbed his

eyes and stared. There must, before, have been at least three or four men standing about the guns and all draped in heavy bushes.

As he watched, one of the guns began to fire again, though he could not see the hands that managed it, and a sudden flutter of twigs and leaves came pattering down upon his head. They had guessed him out in his tree.

He shifted his position to get the full protection of the body of the tree, and gave his attention to the lone gun out on the hill. He would like to put that gun out of working, not because it was doing any harm just now, but because of what might have to be done later. He watched patiently for several minutes, while the gun in the ravine continued to trim the little branches from his tree, but it did not seem that he would get a chance. The fellow in the ditch was keeping entirely under cover and working his gun with a stubborn fixity of idea against the line of the bridge wall.

The sputtering explosion of a soft shell on the bridge startled Wardwell. Now if the Germans had found the creek bed with gas—and, of course, they had every range studied down to a matter of feet—then there was a bad time ahead. He waited while another shell fell into the creek bed below the bridge and another dropped down in front of him right near where the two wounded men had been placed. The foul poison was practically colorless, but, immediately, he could see the little green tufts of grass in the creek bed withering to death.

He slid to the ground and made a low running dive down the bank of the creek. The lieutenant was already giving orders to get the two men up from the bed of the creek and to make holes for them in the top of the bank on the north side. Wardwell saw that the lieutenant had taken his decision. They could not stay here. The creek bed would soon fill with gas. If they were to go

back, they must go at once, across the half mile of open field between them and the river. They must carry at least one wounded man, and, from the elevation, those machine guns could follow them every inch of the way. What was worse, the gas would soon fill the creek bed and then the wind coming down from the hill would carry it back so that it would follow them to the river.

Well, they were not going back. Or at least, Wardwell judged from the lieutenant's dispositions, they were not going back until they had made a try for those machine guns.

Three minutes later they were all strung out just on the edge of the upper bank, with intervals of about fifty feet between them, their bodies curled up tight for a spring, their eyes fixed on the spitting guns up the hill before them. The two hundred and fifty yards of sloping hillside looked as smooth and bare as the top of a slightly tilted table. There did not seem to be a hollow anywhere in it, not as much as the suggestion of a furrow, into which a man might drop for breath and an instant's respite in his rush up toward those guns.

They were stripped of everything except their rifles and the one or two bombs that each man could carry in his rush. They had not needed details of instruction. They had done this thing before.

A man rose silently from the edge of the bank. It was the young lieutenant himself. He did not stand poised, or look at his men. He came up running, and shot forward with that peculiar, side-wheeling motion that many men acquire from running with a foot ball under one arm while warding off tacklers with the other arm stiff. He ran with his pistol clutched stiffly in his right hand, his other arm curled in against his side. Fifty, sixty, seventy feet he drove on, running low and pigeon-toed, always with that wheeling motion, while

the machine guns dropped their other marks and turned their blazing eyes on him.

Before the lieutenant had dropped safe into a little depression of the slope, another man was shooting forward away out on the right. Then another, below the bridge, scooted ahead, dodging along in a way that was his own. Man after man rose running, dove forward for about the length of five seconds—a hundred feet maybe—then dropped flat into anything that looked like a slight protection.

There were no signals, no commands, no noise. It was a game which each man played in his own way. A simple game with only two rules: First, they must not bunch together; second, no man should be last—there must not be any last man.

Saving these two rules, they went forward, each in his own way, each playing out his own hand with death.

Some ran straight, their heads down, their eyes half shut, thinking only of speed. Others ran zig-zagging and dodging as though they were picking their way, although there was no cover at all and no choice of a way.

To the watching foe, who did not even now dare to raise his head above the ground line, there seemed to be not more than three or four men coming up the slope. Of course it was puzzling that those three or four should be able to be continuously popping up at so many different places of a long line. There must be more than that number of men. But there was no way of telling how many. And that, of course, was the reason for the apparently haphazard manner of the rush.

Wardwell, at the extreme right of the uneven line, ran forward with longer sprints than was possible for the men near the middle of the line. In comparison with those others he was reasonably safe out here. His part would come later when, having gotten beyond the line of the machine guns, he must circle down upon them

shooting and bombing and yelling while the men in front made the final rush.

He was not often excited now in this business, which had come to be to him merely the day's work. But, running up the hill, he felt a strange and wonderful tingle of excitation of spirit. Something was waiting for him at the end of this run. He was suddenly as sure as he had ever in his life been sure of anything that this was his last fight.

He felt the breath of bullets driving by near his head and dropped, mechanically obedient to his training. But he was up again in a moment and running madly.

Now he was up to the line of the single gun that had been placed out on the hill. But his business was not with that gun. He must run clear over the brow of the hill and get down into the ravine before the boys in front were ready to run straight upon the guns.

He was running wildly now, his body and his spirit strangely lifted with the sense that the Great Adventure was right ahead. It was not the eagerness of battle nor the fever of fighting that ran in his blood. He knew that he was coming to the break in the wall, beyond which lay the Undiscovered Country—so Augusta was whispering to him.

From the edge of the ravine he saw below him ten or a dozen men lying and working at the three machine guns. Out in the open he saw the broken line of his own fellows. There was the young lieutenant lying flat, wriggling along the ground by inches, and digging impatiently with his toe. They were ready.

Across the space, on the other side of the ravine, there came running a youngster whom the boys called "Watertown"—he was forever talking about the place. He came running to the farther edge of the ravine, swinging his bomb.

Wardwell flung his first bomb down into the cluster of

guns and men, and leaped sliding, stumbling, falling down the crumbling bank.

Half way down he caught his balance, lay back a little, and steadied himself to throw the other bomb. Then without looking to see the effect he gripped his rifle, and yelling madly leaped down towards the guns.

Five seconds later he was lying quietly against the gravel of the bank. There was a hideous commotion going on about him, but he did not mind it. There was a sharp pain—it felt like a burn—in his throat, and he seemed to have trouble breathing. But it did not seem to matter. He was going to sleep anyway.

And then, presently, he would see Augusta. And then he smiled to himself. Augusta had always had her will.

X

WHEN Wardwell awoke he was petulantly disappointed. He was not quite clear as to what he had expected, but that he should be awakened by the old hated smell of anesthetics was a distinct injury.

He did not feel any immediate physical discomfort, but he knew that this was only because his body had not yet begun to wake up. There were even now vague nerve stirrings in various scattered places through his body, though not connected with each other nor, directly, with him. He knew that these sensations would soon begin to link up with each other, and then they would connect up with him. Presently torture would begin. He knew the whole business. He had watched the process before, and he cringed at its advance.

He felt like a boy who has been cheated of some wonderful promised adventure which he had been just about to begin. He was lonely, and he had been cheated, and if he tried to make the slightest move now somebody would come and begin to poke at him. Why couldn't they leave him alone? He wanted to cry.

And yet there was a sort of elusive contentment about this place—he did not know where or what the place was, and did not care—some kind of a pleasant memory, as though some one had been here. He thought he could dream here—if only they would not come poking at him. Maybe he had been dreaming. He could not remember.

There had once been a little white room somewhere. He could not remember where, but it did not matter. Augusta was in the little white room. In fact the little white room and Augusta were much the same

thing. You could not seem to see one without the other.

Why should he think of that little white room and Augusta here? Had Augusta been here? Somehow it seemed like a place where Augusta had just been. That was a funny thing to think of, but that was true about Augusta. He remembered how she had only to be a moment in a room, or any place, and when she went away you could know that Augusta had been there. There was a blessedness, some sort of a happy sweetness, that always came with her and which you could feel after she was gone.

It was strange that he should feel that haunting, ethereal presence of her here. It had never deceived him before. Could it be coming here to mock him now? That would be too much!

If he could only get back to sleep before they came to poke at him, maybe they would leave him alone, and—maybe he could dream. He must have been dreaming of Augusta.

As a matter of fact, Augusta had been in that place, in that room but a moment or two before. Perhaps some tone of her voice had touched something in Wardwell's numb brain and had waked him slowly.

She had not seen him. There was no good reason why she should go near him or see him. He was just one of twenty-five or thirty variously wrapped bundles that had just come down from the field stations, each containing a man. So long as the man slept after the jolting and the fainting fatigue of the journey, he need not be disturbed.

So Augusta had gone on about her affairs. For she was a very busy woman in a very busy place.

Now she was slowly following a surgeon as he worked his way down a long line of cots, stopping at each one to inspect the bandages which had been loosened by a

nurse going before, giving instruction for the washing of a wound where he found that necessary, placing a few swift stitches where the condition of a cut or an open wound demanded, probing sharply and directly with never an unnecessary touch, a man who did three days' work in every one of his days, and often as much more in one of his nights, with a steady temper and a will that procreated discipline and swift service in those about him. He was a middle sized man with Scotch gray eyes, a short gray mustache, very small feet, and excessively large hands whose bones had been overdrawn by hard, grubbing work in his youth on a Maine farm. He was short and blunt of word as most strong men will be when they are putting the best of their lives into the strokes of their day's work. But he was sensitive as a cat or a bird to anything unusual in the air about him. He repeated with unvarying distinctness the few clear orders at the end of each examination, assuming as bluntly as if Augusta had been an echo, or an adding machine, that she heard correctly, that she wrote the instructions properly and that she took each page from her pad and stuck it on the chart at the head of each bed. She was there for that purpose, just like the rest of his instruments. But there was something about this girl today that seemed to be speaking. It was not speaking to him particularly, but to all the world that had the sense to understand. There was a persistent breath of happiness about her that was as patent as sunshine yet as elusive as a perfume in a dream.

After he had finished with the last of the row of men, he stopped in the act of drying his hands and looked quizzically at her. He remembered that yesterday and the day before he had seen in this girl's eyes a peculiar, strained, listening look, as though she were trying to see something or maybe hear something outside the

range of ordinary senses. He had seen that the girl had been laboring under some terrifying anxiety, but, as it had not affected the mechanical perfection of her work, and certainly was not connected with the work, he had said nothing. Now as he saw the quiet loveliness of some assured happiness in her face, he said:

"Young lady, what wonderful thing have you been seeing, since yesterday?"

Augusta looked up at him in startled wonder, but she did not evade or ask him what he meant. She told him the simple truth, so that he might make what he would of it.

"It isn't anything that I've *seen*. It's just something that I *know*."

"Um-hum," agreed the doctor cordially. "Very satisfactory, I'm sure. And very illuminating."

He turned and went out of the ward door into the sunshine of the hot afternoon. Crossing the wide open court where the great red cross was painted on the hard whitewashed surface of the ground, he reflected that, whereas most women would have smiled and evaded and offered some subterfuge and he could then have guessed the facts to a practical certainty, this girl had probably spoken the precise truth—leaving him exactly as wise as he had been before asking.

Augusta, walking slowly back to the head of the line, wondered, smiling, just what the doctor would have said if she had really told him what she meant. She had spoken the literal truth, but it was very far from being what he would have thought truth.

Two days before she had caught a glimpse of Jimmie Wardwell lying with his head thrown back against a bank of stones and earth. And she had seen a great, gaping wound at the base of his throat where his shirt had been torn open. It was but an instant flash of vision that had come to her while she was in the act of writing

THE HILLS OF DESIRE.

him, as though already they were torn of his soul from him. For men of Wardwell like that. When the passion of creative fire in their souls, they are damned alone. No articulate being can combat loneliness they fasten on something of passion. There have been men who at death a rickety old table at which he sat, or even a corner of a garret room. After a while Jimmie lurched up out of bed, and got ready to crawl into bed. He thought that he had missed going down to see her. He dared not face Augusta tonight. The idea of dying, physically, meant life to him. He had never thought of it. He did not know. But the failures of the past made a sure sign of physical failure, of the end of him into blind panic; not a panic of darkness, still less of punishment. Now he knew that the spirit fire, burning pent in him, was to be smothered. He was not he, Jimmie Wardwell, would be smothered. He could form and bring out the things in him and craved for expression. Lying under the bed clothes, he moaned like a hurt child: "Never another goodnight like a child in pain, he fell into a deep sleep. He did not hear, probably he had forgotten. She came with trembling steps and beat at his door for this breathing and then in anxious fear to her own endless night. Wardwell debonair and blithe as the morning came into Augusta's sitting room. He had swept from him all traces of the night, and Augusta knew from the first that she would learn nothing from him in this

DESIRE

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a letter for a wounded man. The man had stopped for a moment, waiting to think of the next thing to be said in the letter. And while she sat waiting with her writing hand suspended over the paper she had looked straight at the dirty, streaked side of a ravine, and there was Jimmie lying there with a trace of a tired but triumphant little laugh on his face. Even in the instant she was sure that she saw him tremble and quiver back against the bank, as though death were striking.

Then the voice of the man on the cot beside her went on slowly—the letter was to his younger brother at home:

“Tell Mom not to bother any more with sweaters, we’ll all be home for Christmas anyway.”

Augusta’s poised hand fell mechanically to the paper and began to write.

She had seen no more. All that day and yesterday she had strained at the windows of her soul, praying and striving to catch again a sight of her loved one. But there had come to her nothing but a cold, terrifying conviction that Jimmie was dead. It must be that he was dead, for if he were alive she was sure that she could make him know that she was crying to him, and she would be able to see him.

Through two days of heart agony she had walked and worked, her body and her outward mind responding capably to the demands of each minute, while her own inner being struggled with the desperation of death, to free itself from the limitations of the senses, so that it might find its mate. But, though her soul had cried and fought and suffered until it seemed that she herself must die, there had come to her vision nothing but the black wall of death.

Jimmie was dead. There was a corpse lying out somewhere under a bank—maybe the dirt had rolled down over it now—and that was the end. There was

nothing more. The black conviction of despair, of hope dead and buried, settled down upon her. Her love was dead. This world was empty, and there was no other.

Late at night, lying alone in her little wood-walled room over in the nurses' pavilion, writhing in her pain, Augusta had spoken aloud.

"You fooled me, God," she said bitterly. "You taught me to believe. And there is nothing—*nothing*."

But the sound of her own voice in the uninterested darkness had turned her thought back to her self. She had only herself to blame. She had cheated herself. She had built up for herself a dream. How could she complain that she should not find it to be only a dream?

Three years ago, on that hideous last day in the little house among the trees in the Hills of Desire, she had stood looking at a scattered bundle of letters, and she had seen a glimpse of a woman's face, a dark, discontented, attractive face.

At that moment there had come into her mind, full formed, the thought that had been the key to her action and to the words that she had written on the typewriter for Jimmie.

She did not know whether Jimmie loved this woman. She did not greatly believe that he did. But it had come to her that her love was spoiled even by the thought that that other woman had looked at it. There was not room for her love in the same world where that other woman lived. Augusta could not share her love loaf even so much as to have it in the same world where there was another who thought greedily upon it.

Out of that thought had grown the conviction which she had written in the line to Jimmie. For this life their love had been spoiled. They were not to have it.

But as she still stood there a whisper had come to her—she had never thought to question whence it came—a clear, flashing, fearful hope had come to her.

Jimmie and she might not live this life together. But one day—the sweet hope sang high to her heart—Jimmie and she, they two, would take the road together, the road that led through the Curtain to the Great Adventure in the Hills of All Desire.

She had lived through the years on the breath of that whisper which had come to her. She had believed in it as a promise. She had kept it in her heart. Only in the very secretest of her communings with the Jimmie to whom her heart constantly talked had she told it to him.

She had hardly put her thought into words, but it was a part of her faith in love. She would not believe that love like hers could die. She did not know how, or in what terms, but she was sure that, somehow, she and Jimmie would find the broken line of love and go on with it.

It had seemed so simple, when it was not near. She had all the time been sure that when Jimmie was ready to go—she had not thought that it would be very long—then she would know it, and she would be ready to go with him.

Many times in the three years she had known when Jimmie was in danger. Twice she had seen his name among Americans wounded with the Canadians. But she had not needed that outward evidence. She had often been able to call him and to feel his response. Though she had never before been able to see him, she had at all times known that he was living and going on.

And lately she had become almost bold. She had felt the coming of what was to be the great moment. She thought that she had felt the shadow of the wings of death—and she was not afraid. She believed that Jimmie would soon be taking the road into the Beyond—and she grew almost openly confident that she was going with him.

She had lived on the very tip of every moment. With a strange defiance of reality, she, a soundly healthy young woman—not knowingly exposed to any more danger than twenty million other inhabitants of France, went into every action of her waking hours with a sort of provisional apology. It might be that she should not have time to finish that action. If so, would some one please see to it.

She had forgotten completely that other woman. She remembered only the dear and perfect love of those months alone with Jimmie; the joy of the irresponsible hours upon the road; the fearful sweetness of their utter seclusion in the hills and their complete dependence one upon the other. She seemed to see now that they had, in those months, realized all the very best that this world gives in love.

She had even come to think that she was glad that their perfect days of love had ended in a sharp crash. How pitiful it would have been to have seen that love, which was all beauty and tenderness and sacrifice on both sides, dribble down into the commonplace of discontent, or, at best, a kindly tolerance! She was glad that it had come to an end while it was yet a perfect, beautiful thing; glad that she could link those months of wonder love directly with the wonder and mystery of what was to come to them.

The three years of separation had not kept them apart. It seemed that they had at first been thrown violently away from each other. But there had been an immediate rebound, and Augusta knew that they had ever since been approaching each other in understanding and spirit. She had worked, and trained, to prepare herself for this work so dear to her which she was doing now. And Jimmie had suffered—here in France. Augusta's eyes had seen the things which he must have gone through, things which her heart

and her intuitions had before told her concerning him. But all seemed only to fit them into the design that was prepared for them. In fact, in the supreme egoism of love, it had not been difficult to believe that the whole world's tragedy had been in some measure arranged to form a setting for their love.

Every subconscious thought of her waking days, every half formed dream of day or night had of late been bringing Jimmie to Augusta, until it seemed that the terrible world about her—which she was still obliged to call reality—could not much longer persist. The end must be near. For she had felt the coming of her love so vividly that material, brute things could not much longer keep it from her.

Jimmie was coming to her! The mistakes, the travail, the dim misunderstandings of this phase of being which was called life, would soon be past. Jimmie and she would once more take the open road out into the country of God.

For weeks her spirit had lived upon and breathed upon her dream, until it, the dream, had become to her the real. And it seemed to her that she was already going through the transition that would bring her out with Jimmie upon the glorious, untried road that lay beyond the world's death. She had no fear. The very daring of her dream had raised in her a faith in love that trembled at nothing.

And then, in an instant, everything had gone black.

She had seen Jimmie. And she had thought that she saw Jimmie die, and—and—*nothing*—

Jimmie was gone from her forever. And there was left to her nothing but the dry little reflection that she had been a fool.

In those two black days when her soul strained, listening and watching over the edges of the normal world, she had breasted the dark tide of despair running

full down upon her, and not even she herself could have told how near she was to going down under it.

And in the darkness, as would happen, the old love came back to mock her. Oh, why, *why?* had she not kept the love that was hers? Why had she not fought that dark woman for it? She had meanly run away, because it was not good enough, because it was not perfect. Because she had found a flaw in it she had thrown away her jewel.

Now it was given her, for punishment, to know how good that love had been. The touch of Jimmie's clumsy hands as he had tucked her into her hammock at night burned her now with the maddening sweetness of a lost dream. The nights when she had watched over him, the pride and the swelling love of seeing rugged health come back to him, the memories of brave, struggling, laughing walks by his side through wind and snow, all these and a thousand dear, intimate memories came to haunt her with the mocking difference between a warm, happy human love, and the empty dream that she had made for herself.

But she did not go down under despair.

Jimmie was gone. She would never be near him again. She did not say it. But she had no strength to deny it. She was dumb. She was defeated. There was nothing to live for, and, apparently, nothing to die for.

But her heart held on, beaten, unhoping, but living.

And today, not an hour ago, a wonderful thing had happened. A miracle had stolen upon her unawares. She could not now say just where she was or what she was doing at the time. She had heard nothing, seen nothing. But she found that she was suddenly, and unaccountably, certain that Jimmie was not dead.

She did not try to think what might have brought this intelligence to her. Perhaps he had come back to consciousness and his heart had answered her. She did

not care. She did not want to think. Her dream had sprung back to life again and was once more carrying her, happy but still trembling and fearful, up again through the heights from which she had fallen.

She had told the doctor the exact truth. It was not anything that she had seen or heard. But she *knew* that somehow a message had come to her heart from Jimmie. God had not mocked her faith. She *knew*. And she waited.

It was a long, long summer afternoon through which she worked and waited, her spirit quivering to the sense of a great wonder hovering near at hand. She did not feel or recognize any premonition that Wardwell was physically near her. She had schooled herself well since those terrible early days, back in the base hospital, when she had fearfully crept near to and studied every long bundle of a broken man that was brought in, praying that it might be, and that it might not be, Jimmie. She did not do those things now, for she had learned the heavy cost of them upon her strength and her nerves. And now, too, she was still living upon that sight of Jimmie lying out in the open at the foot of a bank, and, curiously, she did not think of him as having been moved from there.

When Wardwell awoke again it was because his throat was hurting abominably. His mind seemed to clear instantly, and he could not remember to have felt so wide awake in a long time. He supposed that this meant that he was going to get well again. He was not pleased with the prospect, for the weeks of monotonous endurance just ahead were too well known to be welcome; but he guessed that he would have to go through with it. This confounded pain in his throat was about the worst thing he had ever experienced. His mouth was all hard and cracked inside and the big bandage above his shoulders seemed to be set on purpose to choke him.

He would like to put up his hand and see if he couldn't ease it a little, but he was sure that as soon as he made a move someone would notice him, and they would begin the business of poking at him. He would rather stand this as long as he could if only he were left to himself.

It was night now—he knew the shaded lights, the enforced quiet, the restless murmurings of men asleep and half asleep, the feeling of a hospital ward at night, as well as he knew the sound of his own breathing—and he had been moved since that last time when he had been awake. Maybe they had been obliged to clear him out of the receiving ward—probably that was where he had been that last time—without operating on him. Maybe the boys were coming down from the stations pretty fast. He had seen hospitals when the surgeons couldn't begin to keep up with the work as the men were brought in. In fact he had seen everything. He had seen the whole blasted wreck of war from beginning to end, and he didn't want to see any more of it.

His head was propped a little, so that he could just see over the roll of bandage on his neck. A wardmaster was coming softly down the lane between the two rows of cots. "I know his kind," Wardwell muttered mentally, while he shut his eyes and waited, perfectly quiet, for the wardmaster to pass, "their idea of a good time is to pop a fellow out of a sound sleep right bang onto an operating table."

He felt rather than heard the wardmaster stop an instant at the foot of the cot, looking down at him, then he heard the footfall go softly on down the lane. "Fooled you that time, old scout," thought Wardwell, with a sort of a foolish gladness and a feeling that he was just about to either laugh or cry. His throat did hurt like fury.

Then he thought of Augusta. Curious, but he had

been certain that she was somewhere near that last time when he had been awake. Now he did not seem to be able to feel her near. But just then his mind played a trick upon him. He did not know whether or not he had shut his eyes for the moment, but he saw something that he very distinctly remembered having seen before. One feverish night, in the wagon, on the road, four years ago, he had wakened from an early sleep. A bar of white moonlight came in through a little square opening above the flap of the wagon and fell directly on the pale golden crown of Augusta's rippling hair. She was kneeling on the bare floor of the wagon, her arms and head sagged forward into her little hammock.

She had fallen asleep at her night prayers.

And he felt now the big choking throb of pity and tenderness and love that had come up in his throat at the sight of her. The memory dropped away instantly, and he was again staring through the dimmed lights at the bare board walls of the long ward room. But it did not seem that Augusta was quite so far away as she had been when he awoke.

It is of no connection here. But Augusta was, at that moment, across the open court in the nurses' pavilion, in the dark by the side of her own cot, happily saying her tired night prayers.

Wardwell lay quiet a little while, wondering how long he would be able to hold out against the burning pain in his throat. Perhaps he was foolish after all. Maybe he might as well call attention to himself and let them have it over with. They wouldn't hurt him any more than this.

There was a queer thumping noise coming from somewhere, which he could not make out, and which annoyed him. It was not gunfire of any kind—didn't he know every kind?—and if it were, what would it be doing around here? He must be miles and miles down

from any fighting line. This was a regular, big, established hospital. He had no idea as to just where it was, but it was certainly a long way from where fighting was to be done. Yet there were explosions going on somewhere around here. He had no personal interest in the matter, but he wanted to know what the deuce they were thinking of. Didn't they know that there were wounded men here who ought to have quiet!

But the thumping kept on, and came closer.

Now there were other sounds, voices outside. Other people had noticed the thing, and they were going to have it stopped. Well, it certainly ought to be stopped. Wardwell saw that some of the fellows around him were being waked up by it, and he felt sorry and indignant for them. It was a shame! Some confounded fool—

The heavy thud and shudder of an explosion shook the light walls of the ward, and on its heels there followed a roaring, tearing, ripping sound of timbers and boards being torn apart and flung about through the air. Then there rose the cries of men and women, running together and shouting in the night. Then you could hear sharp orders snapped out of the confusion.

Another and more terrifying explosion blew out the end of a building just a little way from the ward where Wardwell lay, and a flying timber, driven endwise, jabbed through the roof and stuck six feet of its length into the ward, right over a fellow's head, fourth bed to the left. Wardwell was sure he counted right. He would like to know who the poor fellow—

Now there came a continuous rock and roar that seemed to come right up out of the earth and turn to smash everything flat, and the popping of aircraft guns hurried up by cursing men began to announce the hideous truth of what was happening.

A man whose cot lay foot to foot across from Ward-

well's sat straight up. He was an oldish man, among the men here, with a good round face and a bald head.

"God blast them blind!" he said soberly. "They're bombing the Red Cross right over our heads!"

The wardmaster came walking up the line between the beds, speaking steadily through the roaring, splintering din.

"Silence, boys," he was saying, "and keep the blankets up over you. It's all we can do. They're passing over now. It can't last long."

Now Wardwell considered this thing, and his hands went slowly and craftily up to the bandages around his neck. He was fairly certain that if he loosened the bandages he would bleed and faint and die in a very short time. God! A man had *some* rights in this business!

He had stood out and lain out to be shot at from every angle with every kind of a gun that had been made. And he had not even complained at the gas. But to be butchered now, when he was lying here with a pain in his throat that would have made him cry if even the gentlest nurse's hand touched him! He would not have it! A man had *some* rights!

His hands found the bandages and began to tug at them, but a frightful crash up at the end of the ward, where the wardmaster had just walked, held his attention for a moment.

In the tail light of the explosion he saw boards, and men, and a medicine chest, and beds, and the end of the building, erupting all together out into the night. And then, when he could look again he saw through the open space the low horizon stars shining gently in their places.

The lights were gone now, and he could feel the fright rising in the men around him. They were afraid in the dark. They began to yell. Some swore queer oaths, original ones, with tears in their throats. Some

called to God. And some yelled pitifully to somebody to bring a light.

Wardwell began again to tug at the bandages.

But just then, above the cursing, and some praying, and the frightful, tearing roar of death all about, he heard a girl, down near the end of the room that was still sound, a girl had come into the ward singing. He listened, and the words that he heard were these:

"Gyp, Gyp, me little horse?"

"Gyp-Gyp, again, sir."

"How many miles to Dublin?"

"Four score an' ten, sir."

High and sweet as the voice of a robin bird in the trees of the Hills of Desire he heard the voice of his love.

Then the howl and the tearing jaws of death all around had their sway again. He had thought always that Augusta would somehow come to him before the end. But, My God! he had never bargained for this! This was real! Augusta was here, in this death hole! He must get her out of here. What business had she! Who had let her come here?

He was out of his cot and staggering, bumping down the cot frames, toward the voice that rang again triumphant, singing:

"Gyp, Gyp, me little horse?"

"Gyp-Gyp, again, sir."

Now he was coming near her. Now! Another staggering step or two, if he could only keep his feet straight! Now he was just going to touch her, to take her in his arms! He had almost lurched past her in the dark. Now he had her in his arms!

He thought he whispered her name, but it was really a wild yell in her ear:

"Augusta!"

In the first swaying, burning instant their hearts leaped together and were one at last. There was nothing from the past; nothing to be explained, nothing to be condoned. Love and truth had burned all things clear and true for them. They belonged to each other. They were of each other. And neither life nor death could touch their love now!

And now, curiously, it was Wardwell who did not resist what seemed to be the conclusion of fate. He had not wanted to die with Augusta. He had wanted to *live* with her! But now, if she had foreseen this, that they were to go together in this way: Well, he was willing to take her lead, as always. She should have her way. Her way was always right.

But Augusta had her love in her arms, and he was wounded, and fainting, and leaning upon her. The fierce, protecting surge of mothering nature rose up in her. She looked into the face of fire, and red murder, and death, and sprang into battle with them all for him. They should not have him! He was hers, and *she* would have him!

She had come into her ward singing her little song, to help the poor fellows through a bad few minutes. She could not have dreamed that it was to be as bad as this fiendish reality, but she had already forgotten her indignation, her pity, her thought of anyone or anything but Jimmie Wardwell who was swaying leaning upon her breast. To take him out of here to the blessed open, to keep him from being hurt, was the thing, it seemed, for which she had lived her life!

The short moment of darkness in which they had somehow found each other was blasted out into a white flaring light and they were shaken stumbling

and trembling together by an explosion which completely blew out the end of the building where Augusta had come in.

Looking over her shoulder she saw that she must take him, carry him if he could not help her, out through that band of fire where already the jagged sides and roof of the building were being fringed with scallops of licking flame.

She called on him for an effort, pleading with him to try, to put one foot before another, to help just one little bit. But his weight lay almost dead upon her shoulder. He was fainting from his effort to come to her and from the shock of the last terrible explosion. She must do all herself. The hoop of fire flamed before her, through which she must drag him, and her mind and reason quailed but her heart fought on for its love, blessing God for the strong sure feet that the hills had given her and the cunning strength in handling the helpless bodies of men which her training had taught her. These things had been given to her for this her moment.

Her ears were full of the fearful cries of men in madness, her eyes were open only to see that ring of fire toward which she was staggering with her burden, but her heart was strong and sure. What cared she for the dreams of a heaven that she had made, when she had the warm body of her love in her arms!

All the women in creation might write love letters to him, but he was hers and she would take him through that ring of fire and out to safety! He was hers, and she would have him!

Men shouted to her, to go back, that help was coming quickly another way, that she was crazy to try to go out that way. But she fought her way out step by step, through all the blurring horror, up to the ring of fire, and, staggering, whispering, praying to her love, she

went stumbling through wreck and spitting flames, half carrying, half dragging her man out into God's open.

A little way out in the grass, away from the worst of the danger, she stopped—she could go no farther—and let him slip, cunningly and gently as she could, full length upon the ground.

For the moment, they were left alone. Men running shouting to the work of rescue did not heed them. And Augusta knelt fixing the big bandage to Jimmie's throat, and whispering to him. For now, when the strength of her body was exhausted, her heart went cold with the fear that he had died in her arms.

But the cool freshness of the grass came up like a reviving shock to Wardwell's body. He stirred easily, drew two or three good breaths, and then he spoke, slowly and easily.

"How is it, dear," he asked, plainly knowing that Augusta was there with him, "are we going *on*, or do we stay? Whichever it is, you know, I'm for you."

Augusta gave one little animal cry of pure joy. For, instantly, she *knew* that all was well, that she would have him again, alive and strong! Then she bubbled over in tears and the hysteria of gladness, crying:

"We're going to *stay*, Jimmie darling, we're going to *stay*! And if I wasn't afraid of hurting you, I'd hug and kiss you till—!"

"Oh, you might take a chance—" said Jimmie. And he went contentedly off to sleep.

Out of the chaos of noise and the uncertain light a big tall doctor man came striding across the grass to them, dressed in a long white operating coat which he had forgotten to throw off.

Augusta rose to her knees and to her overstrained senses the tall white figure advancing upon her must have taken on some kind of a supernatural appearance.

We do not know just what was in her mind, probably it is not important. But she raised her hand in a foolish little salute, and said, somewhat apologetically, to the doctor:

“If you please, God, we’ve changed our mind. We’d much rather live.”

Then she slid quietly down in a faint beside Jimmie.

To this day that surgeon thinks that he did not hear correctly.

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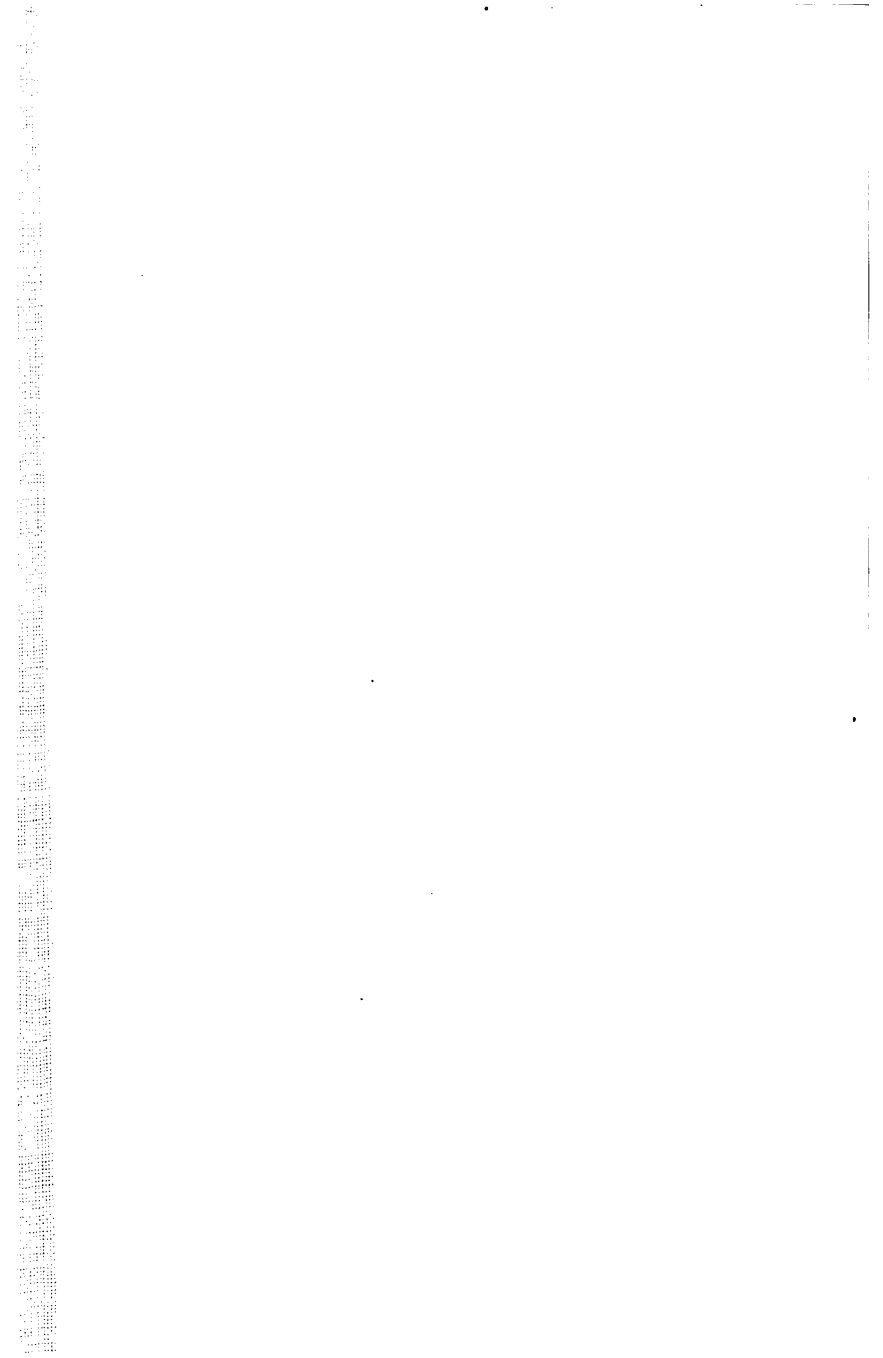
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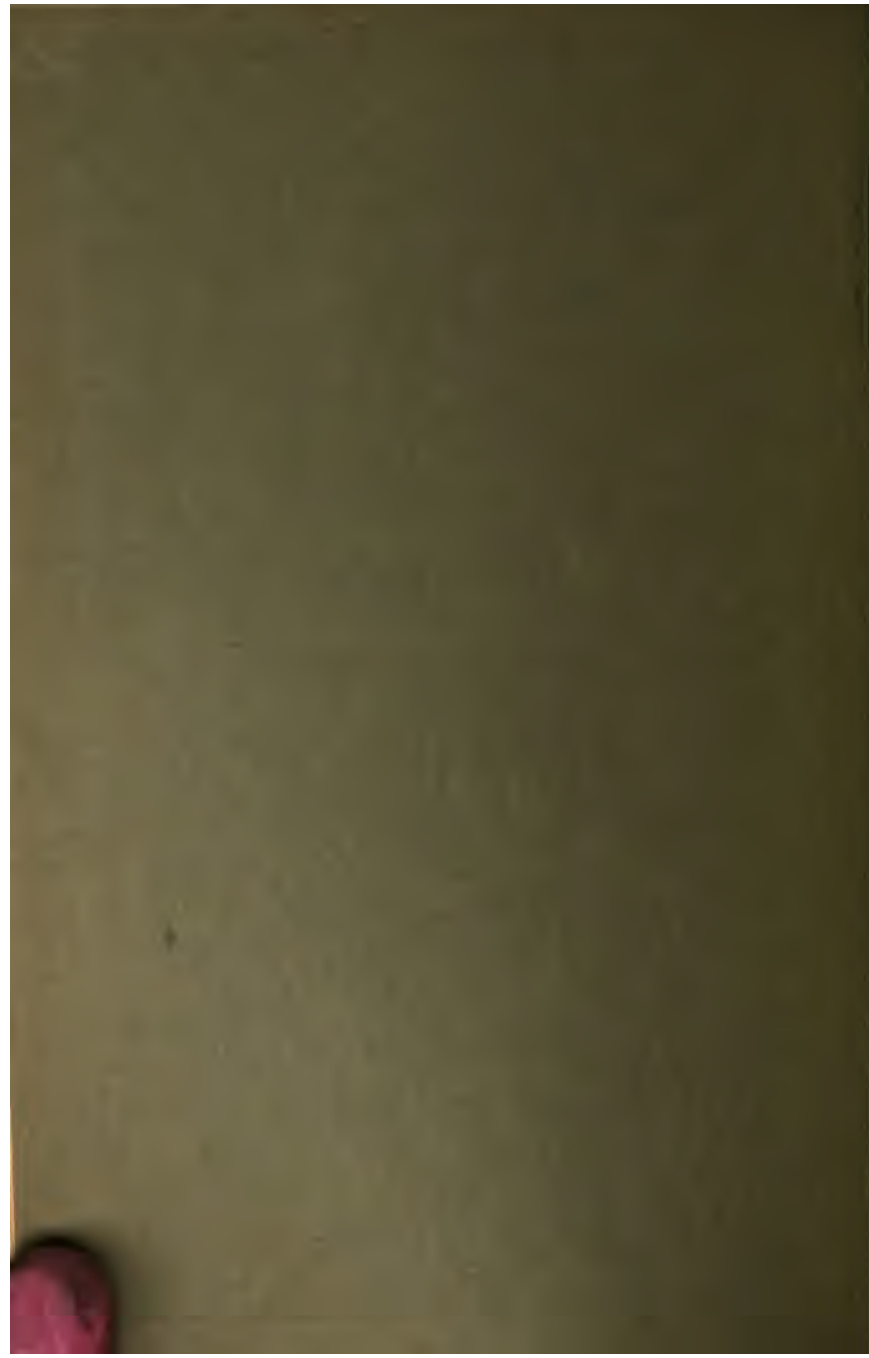
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